

# Wild

AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

Summer  
(January–March) 1997, no 63  
\$6.95\* NZ \$8.95 (incl GST)



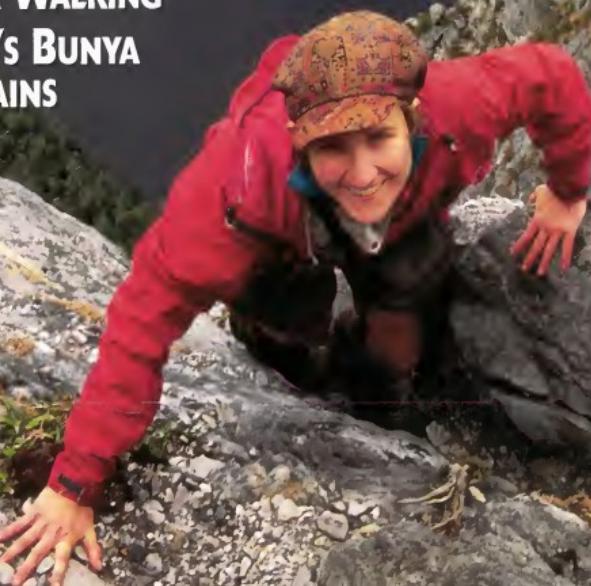
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# Wild

AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

Established 1981

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Summer  
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Founding Member

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## WARNING

The activities covered in this magazine are dangerous. Undertaking them without proper training, experience, skill, regard to safety, and equipment could result in serious injury or death.

**Cover** Helen Collins ascending Federation Peak, South-west Tasmania. Kevin McGannan

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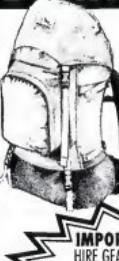
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Names and addresses should be written on disks, manuscripts and photos. While every care is

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## editorial

# Giving back

**Wild Publications is a founding member of a new environmental enterprise**

The name chosen for an important new enterprise by the Australian outdoors industry is the Conservation Alliance. Member businesses will donate an agreed proportion of their total annual sales revenue for carefully selected environmental projects.

Given Wild's position in this industry and our policy of supporting the Australian environment—both editorially and financially—since we began to publish in 1981, we had no hesitation in committing our business to being one of the handful of founding members of the Conservation Alliance. Further details on this exciting and worthwhile new organisation appear on page 21, in Green Pages.

## OPEN FIRE

Couldn't find the Letters to the Editor (Wildfire) in this issue, eh? About to send us a nasty one yourself? There's no cause for alarm, we've simply moved them. In fact, we've brought 'em to where they belong we hear you say—up front—so we trust that you approve of this change. You'll find them starting on page 7.

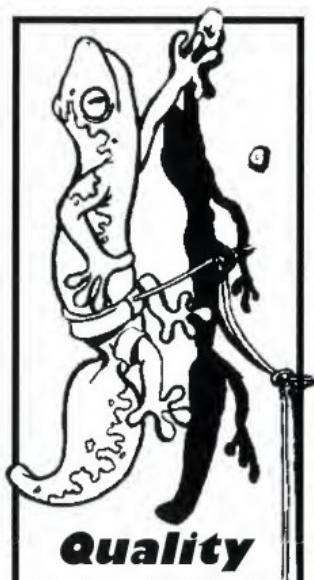
## NEW FACE

As this issue was about to go to press we farewelled Peter Woolford and welcomed Lachlan Drummond to the important position of managing the sales of our advertising, and of our magazines to outdoors shops. An enthusiastic bushwalker and climber, Lachlan joins us with good experience in outdoors retailing.

Chris Baxter

**Environmental impact statement**

Wild is printed on Montza paper, which is made of 35 per cent pre-consumer waste and 15 per cent post-consumer waste that has been recycled and oxygen bleached. The cover has a water-based vanish (not an environmentally detrimental UV or plastic finish). We recycle the film used in the printing process. Wild staff run an environmentally aware office. Waste paper is recycled, printer ribbons are re-inked and waste is kept to an absolute minimum. We invite your comments and recommendations; please contact the Managing Editor.



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# 'Misinformation and mischievous statements'

**Victoria's Alpine Resorts Commission revs up**

I have just read Green Pages in *Wild* no 62 and wish to correct the misinformation and mischievous statements concerning the Commission's policy in respect of snowmobiling.

Following consideration by the respective management committees, the Commission called for tenders for the operation of guided snowmobile tours on a trial basis for two years within the Falls Creek and Mt Hotham alpine resorts. In both cases the tender documents specified routes, contained entirely within alpine resorts, to be used in the operations and extensive conditions to be met in the conduct of the guided tours. Tenderers were also advised that the operations would be subject to constant monitoring by the Commission and an assessment of the operations at the end of the two-year trial period.

The routes have been carefully selected. They cannot and do not include any land outside the boundaries of the alpine resorts because the Commission has no jurisdiction outside these boundaries. As you well know, the use of the Alpine National Park is controlled by the Department of Natural Resources & Environment, not by the Commission, and is subject to the provisions of the Alpine National Park, Management Plan-Bogong Unit.

If it will assist you and your readers to appreciate the true situation and allay your fears, I am happy to make available for inspection copies of the relevant approvals. Furthermore, I would request that you publish this letter so that your readers are given the chance to form their own opinions on the basis of correct information.

Peter Howarth  
Chief Executive Officer  
Alpine Resorts Commission  
Box Hill, Vic

See page 21 in Green Pages. Editor

## Support

Just a short note to thank you and your staff for all your continued support for wilderness conservation. It really is appreciated...

Kevin Parker

National Campaign Director  
The Wilderness Society  
Brisbane, Qld

shows that you do not seem to believe in the family's place in the bush. All the photos are of 20- to 40-year-olds without kids. This reinforces the belief by many that the greens don't care about you if you don't fall into this group.

Once more than one child comes along you are very limited in the amount of time you can bushwalk. A small child must be carried when the going gets tough and that leaves one adult to carry the tent and supplies... The alternative is to go somewhere where you can drive and use an area as a base. If you don't want to be hassled by drunks and hoods, or listen to the next camp playing Metallica until 2 am in easily reached places, a 4WD is the obvious way to go.

Contrary to popular opinion among some groups, a 4WD can be driven with minimal impact on the bush. I wouldn't take one out if this were not so. The Tread Lightly! campaign and the \$5000 fine is working on the hoons who are also derided among the 4WD community...

Locking all but a small group of people out of the bush is suicide for the wilderness groups. People will get out of the habit of going to the bush, lose interest, and the green awareness will last only one generation. I want to instil the same love that I have for the bush into my children...

Ken Brodrick  
Blaxland, NSW

## No clue?

I am writing in relation to your article 'Lost' in [Wild Information] *Wild* no 60. The article relates to the search for an overdue bushwalker, Wade Butler, in Tasmania's Southern Ranges and Precipitous Bluff area.

I was the officer in charge of the search and can assure your readers that all was done that could be done to try to find Wade Butler. The search was conducted by the Tasmania Police Search & Rescue Section with the very able and valuable



## Greens sterile?

I refer to your article 'Feral vehicle invasion' in the Green Pages of *Wild* no 60.

I think many people have blinkers on and see only their own point of view. I was a bushwalker before I owned a 4WD so I can see both sides of the wilderness access debate. (I agree with all your points of logging native forests.)

Bushwalking was always the favourite until we started a family, then a 4WD became the mode of getting out.

This is the first of your magazines I have bought and I notice the lack of pictures of families with small children (read 'none') and so I can understand your desire to see motorised transport removed from the bush. The photo on page 28 of a laughing man up to his elbows and thighs in mud

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# EXTREME

assistance of a large number of other organisations and individuals.

The purpose of this letter is to correct the 'Lost' article's impression that 'no clues regarding the fate of the missing bushwalker were discovered'. In fact on the second day of the search (Thursday 23 November 1995) searchers located footprints in the Mt Wylly area consistent with being those of Wade Butler. These footprints were followed west towards Precipitous Bluff where they were lost near Precipitous Bluff Low Camp. The search was then concentrated in this area and the nearby Limestone Creek.

By the time the search concluded on Monday 27 November more than 30 people had spent four days combing the bush around the southern and western sides of Precipitous Bluff.

Tasmania Police cooperated to the fullest extent possible with the subsequent privately funded search for Mr Butler. At the conclusion of the private search I was informed that that search also had not resulted in finding further evidence regarding Wade Butler...

ME Massie

Inspector  
Officer in Charge  
Marine & Rescue Division  
Tasmania Police  
Hobart, Tas

## Club doubt

I feel that the survey and letter regarding bushwalking clubs in *Wild* nos 60 and 61 have overlooked one of the most important issues...

The practice of certain clubs taking excessively large groups into the bush, especially into wilderness/remote/fragile areas, needs some serious rethinking. The solitude and wild values which we seek in the bush can be severely compromised by such large groups. Even with the soundest minimum-impact techniques I find it hard to believe that a group of 15+ can have a negligible environmental impact. It doesn't take too much imagination to realise how the 'wilderness' experience of others is affected when parties of this size are encountered in the bush.

Social activities may be an important part of many clubs, but it must be considered that, under certain circumstances, they may not sit well with wilderness conservation. Clubs must be genuine and decide where their motivations really lie. If it is conservation they desire, maximum limits of eight persons rather than 16 or more need to be put into place for all trips into wilderness, alpine and possibly other areas.

The concept of bushwalking clubs being anything but highly responsible for the environment (as Mr Quinn alludes to being the case in his survey) causes concern. If clubs are anything but highly conscious of the environment, they may be better classed as social clubs which use the bush as a venue rather than as bushwalking clubs. There is a fundamental difference.

It is a fine line between promoting peoples' enjoyment of the environment and dam-

aging the environment through overuse. With ever-growing demands being placed on our wild areas, all bushwalking clubs need to take the lead through example so that the values of these places are not degraded through incompatible and irresponsible practices.

Paul Mooney  
Thirroul, NSW

## Anything but

*Wild* no 61 is full of scenic beauty and wilderness. Words, photographs, emotions and adjectives are all used to describe the wild and the beautiful.

I've no doubt that as you in Australia read of these places your emotions are stirred, but as I sit in the London Underground reading about the Shoalhaven, Mt Loch and other such places I feel that my emotions towards these places and our environment must be so much greater than your own.

After two years of European living I can only crave the space, spirituality and beauty of wilderness. I long to walk without roads, houses and footpaths, and more than anything I hunger to camp in the bush. There is nothing that sounds as wonderful as the bush on a clear, still night.

Travelling throughout continental Europe and the UK I have discovered neither wilderness nor solitude. Motorways, cities, railways, public footpaths and people invade every single space. Natural habitat is rare and anything but unspoilt. Yes, the geography is amazing, but the wilderness is totally extinct.

Like many of *Wild*'s readers I have sat in Australia and claimed to be environmentally conscious. I've donated money, signed petitions and even marched to save our wild places and natural heritage, but the longer I spend in Europe the more I realise that I have not done enough. For whilst our wilderness is still threatened by governments and individuals who continue to chip old-growth instead of plantation, build wider, longer roads and push us ever closer to another mountain resort, we as a nation are losing the battle. We are watching no less than the death of our natural heritage and the destruction of our wilderness.

I implore all *Wild* readers to get involved in order to save what is left of our wilderness. Write letters, protest on site, berate your local member of Parliament, challenge ministers, donate money, act on the *Wild* Action Box, boycott companies and support the likes of Jill Redwood. Do whatever you can and do it as often as you can, for over here is the future of Australia's wilderness and it is anything but pristine, beautiful and natural.

Please get involved.

Andrew Gallagher  
London, UK

Readers' letters are welcome (with sender's full name and address for verification). A selection will be published in this column. Letters of less than 200 words are more likely to be printed. Write to the Editor, *Wild*, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.

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# The pass laws

**Pay as you walk the Sunshine State**

#### ● Prepare for the Park Pass

All Queensland National Park users will be required to buy one of three new entry permits to be issued by the Department of Environment from December 1996. A 'Park Pass'—in effect an entry fee for all the State's National Parks and other protected areas—must be presented to a ranger on request by anyone using one of these reserves from 1 March 1997.

Three different Park Passes will be available: a daily one (\$3.00 for an adult, \$2.00 for holders of a Commonwealth Health Care Card), a monthly one (\$10/\$5) and a yearly one (\$20/\$10). People under the age of 18 will be admitted free. The passes will be available from Department of Environment offices, National Parks offices and from park visitor centres.

Queensland now joins Tasmania in charging an entry fee for all its National Parks although most other States require fees to be paid for entry to some parks and for the use of many camping grounds. The Park Pass does not replace any existing camping fees—which must still be paid—but does it remove the need to apply for a camping permit for bush camping where this applies at present. The Department of Environment justifies the fees as 'a small contribution' to the upkeep of parks and the provision of visitor facilities.

The announcement of the Park Pass coincided with the release of the Queensland National Parks & Wildlife Service's 1996–97 *Park Improvement Program*, a

document detailing work to be carried out in the State's National Parks over the coming months. While rucksack-sports enthusiasts may be relieved that the new fees are relatively low and be quite happy to contribute to the environmental management of these precious areas, some may question the emphasis the *Park Improvement Program* seems to place on the upgrading of facilities for day visitors and 'car campers'. This includes the construction or extension of walkways and lookout platforms, the cutting of new tracks and even new roads, and the provision of showers and basic laundry facilities at one camping ground at least.

#### ● World Rogaining Championships

After three years of planning, it finally came—the weekend for the Second World Rogaining Championships, held in Western Australia on 31 August and 1 September. Nearly 700 people entered the rogaine and despite an abundance of blisters and sore feet, the event was a great success. The weather was good for rogaining with clear skies for most of the night and maximum daytime temperatures around 20°C.

Even a shower soon after the start did not dampen the enthusiasm too much.

Competitors were set a difficult course with many route options. Some of the challenges included negotiating the ubiquitous rocks on the ground, fighting off the wild emus and avoiding the endless spider webs.

Nearly half the teams set off through the carpet of wild flowers that surrounded the hash house to climb directly up Mt Singleton, 350 metres above the start. A heavy shower made the steep rocks slippery and the views were lost in the mist. Many teams regretted this choice as they used too much energy climbing to the summit, and the rugged slopes that were crossed to descend to the controls on the far side were slow going. Later in the night there were three hours between sunset and moonrise and quite a few teams found themselves in difficult terrain and decided to make the long walk back to the hash house for very few points. The teams that had missed Mt Singleton at the beginning

## skiing the world

Ten years ago, as beginner cross-country skiers, we were visiting Switzerland and took part in the Engadin Skimarathon—42 long kilometres through extremely spectacular mountain country. We hired waxless skis and, although we took a long time, we enjoyed the atmosphere, the scenery and the feeling of achievement as we reached the 'Ziel'. At that time we learnt of the Worldloppet ski races which enable citizen racers to become Worldloppet Masters by completing 10 of the 13 race series and we dreamt that we might some day achieve this ourselves.

In 1991 Australia became host to the Kangaroo Hoppet—a 42 kilometre race held at Falls Creek every August which is part of the Worldloppet series. Completing the Hoppet for the first time in 1993 inspired us to buy a World-

loppet Passport and get our first stamp for completing our own Aussie race.

Fortunately, Europe and Scandinavia run nine of the Loppet races, which enables crazy Australians who cannot afford to travel to Europe every year to attempt to become Worldloppet Masters in one season. As we were both eligible for long service leave, we set off on our epic and 21 January found us at Lienz in Austria, ready to begin the Dolomitenlauf—a 60 kilometre, freestyle race. Nine weeks later we stood in the Lillehammer ski stadium, having completed the nine races.

The challenge included three trips from the southern parts of Europe up to Scandinavia and Estonia by plane, train and ferry—and back again. The races ranged in distance from 42 kilometres—the Engadin Skimarathon in Switzerland—to Sweden's 90 kilometre Vasaloppet, said to be the world's oldest, longest and largest ski race.

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Pat and Allan Miller

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of the course were able to reach some of the easier controls at the south-west end of the map as darkness arrived. When dawn came most of the fancied teams were still out on the course. At the finish only a couple of teams were late but many of the best arrived within the last ten minutes. The winning team was that of David Rowlands and James Russell from Victoria.

*Richard Matthews*

#### ● Paddling softly

The Australian Alps Liaison Committee, which is responsible for coordinating the management of the various State National Parks covering the Australian Alps, has released a River Users Code for paddlers venturing on to our alpine rivers. The pamphlet includes information on minimal-impact camping and paddling and is available from National Parks offices in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and Victoria.

#### ● Cave conference

The 21st biennial conference of the Australian Speleological Society is to be held at Quorn in the northern Flinders Ranges next Easter (29 March–3 April 1997). The caving society will also celebrate its 40th year by holding an anniversary

dinner. Enquiries should be directed to Tim Pawnee, PO Box 3146, Rundle Mall, Adelaide, SA 5000.

#### ● Corrections and amplifications

From *Wild* no 58: Stephen Bunton has written to inform us that 'A recent visit to several of Australia's longest caves has caused a dispute over their quoted lengths (see *Wild Information*, page 17). Burkes Backyard in the Northern Territory is a series of interconnecting canyons with some roofed sections. These could not be considered as one, long cave. Similarly, Old Homestead Cave in Western Australia is actually two caves which extend from opposite sides of a collapse doline. Although the depth is measured from the lip of the depression, it would be misleading to quote the cumulative length of the two caves since they do not have a continuous dark zone as is the case at Jenolan in New South Wales or at Exit Cave in Tasmania.'

From *Wild* no 62: Glenn van der Knijff, who wrote 'The History of the Buffalo', which begins on page 38, has told us of recent historical research which suggests that the first ski tow in Australia was built at Cresta (also at Mt Buffalo) in 1937, not at Dingo Dell in 1936 as stated in his article. The bark background image used through-

out 'The Wilderness Society—20 Years On' which begins on page 44 is from a slide taken by Kirsty Hamilton (not Paul Sinclair) and is of a brittle gum, not a spotted gum. (Did any sharp-eyed reader pick the difference?) The Croajingolong National Park map reviewed on page 107 is issue three, not issue four.

## NEW SOUTH WALES

#### ● Rescue award

Well-known bushwalkers Peter Treseder and Keith Maxwell were recently presented with the NSW Volunteer Rescue Association's highest service award for their work with Bushwalkers' Wilderness Rescue, the oldest land-based rescue squad in Australia. Treseder and Maxwell have been active in the celebrated organisation since the early 1970s.

Meanwhile Treseder teamed with Keith Williams to make the first unsupported longitudinal traverse of the northern Simpson Desert in August. A number of teams have made strong attempts on the crossing during the past 20 years, all failing as a result of the difficulties associated with carrying enough water for the crossing. Treseder and Williams each dragged a cart, laden mainly with water and weighing 260 kilograms when the trek began, for the 500 kilometre, 21-day crossing. Treseder said afterwards that their success where so many had failed had been due to an ultralightweight approach, carrying almost nothing but water and food.

Soon after the end of this expedition, Treseder broke the long-standing Yerranderie Peak round trip record of 31 minutes set by Derek Cantle in 1982. Treseder's time was 26 minutes, 45 seconds. In October Treseder took two hours off Warwick Daniel's Katoomba–Black Coolabimblow Peak return trip record set in 1971, taking 16 hours and 48 minutes. (Both routes are in the Blue Mountains.)

## VICTORIA

#### ● Hoppet marred by blizzard

Competitors in the 1996 Kangaroo Hoppet held at Falls Creek on 31 August battled blizzards with gusts of up to 180 kilometres an hour and subzero temperatures. Despite the conditions, more than 1100 skiers finished the 42 kilometre Kangaroo Hoppet, the 21 kilometre Australian Birkebeiner and the 7 kilometre Joey Hoppet. These three events combine to form Australia's major cross country ski race, which is the first of the Worldloppet ski races held around the world each year (see box on page 13).

In what organisers described as an unfortunate mix-up in the main Hoppet event, the star of the race—leading German skier Johanni Muhlegg—found himself skiing a fourth lap of what was only a three-lap course. Andre Jungwirth (Switzerland) and Martin Petrasek (Czech Republic) crossed the finishing-line soon afterwards, closely followed by Elbert Karlsson (Sweden). The

## Wild Diary

Information about rucksack-sports events for publication in this department should be sent to the Editor, *Wild*, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.

### December

14 Introductory canoe/kayak course	Vic	(03) 9459 4277
14–15 Instructor training/assessment C	NSW	(044) 65 1089
27–31 Red Cross Murray Marathon C	Vic	(03) 9685 9837

### January 1997

6–9 Introductory canoe/kayak course	Vic	(03) 9459 4277
11 Learn to canoe/kayak course	NSW	(02) 9660 4597
12 Basic skills canoe/kayak assessment	NSW	(02) 9660 4597
25–26 Introductory canoe/kayak course	Vic	(03) 9459 4277

### February

1–2 Basic skills instructor intake C	Vic	(03) 9459 4277
Introduction to sea kayaking	Vic	(03) 9459 4277
4–5 Basic skills instructor training/assessment C	NSW	(02) 9344 0332
Basic skills instructor assessment C	ACT	(06) 287 3032
8 Cradle Mountain Track run	Tas	(03) 6395 4294

9 Proficiency testing C	Vic	(03) 9459 4277
White-water proficiency assessment C	ACT	(06) 287 3032
15 Upside Down 12-hour R	NSW	(02) 9874 0226
15–16 Basic skills instructor assessment C	Vic	(03) 9459 4277
22 Metrogaine/Cycloamine R	Vic	(03) 9890 4352
Upside Down 12-hour R	WA	(09) 275 4734

### February (continued)

22–23 Introductory canoe/kayak course	Vic	(03) 9459 4277
24 Metrogaine 6-hour R	Qld	(07) 3369 1641

### March

1–2 ACT Championships 12- and 24-hour R	ACT	(06) 295 6019
1–3 Cradle to Coast Ultra Challenge M	Tas	(03) 6244 5222
15 Learn to canoe/kayak course	NSW	(02) 9660 4597
15–16 Introductory canoe/kayak course	Vic	(03) 9459 4277
16 Proficiency testing C	Vic	(03) 9459 4277
21–23 6-, 12-, 24- and 50-hour R	Vic	(03) 9890 4352
22–23 24-hour R	Tas	(03) 6223 8201
23 Metrogaine 6-hour R	SA	(08) 8364 4390
Eildon Triathlon M	Vic	(03) 9459 4277
28–31 Introduction to sea kayaking and proficiency testing	Vic	(03) 9459 4277
29–30 Basic skills instructor assessment C	NSW	(02) 9344 0332
Basic skills instructor training C	ACT	(06) 287 3032
April		
6 6-hour R	ACT	(06) 249 4914
12–13 Introductory canoe/kayak course	Vic	(03) 9459 4277
VCC beginners' and lead-climbing course (week one) RC	Vic	(03) 9428 5298
19 State 24-hour Championships R	SA	(08) 8364 4390
19 8-hour R	Vic	(03) 9890 4352
19–20 Basic skills instructor intake C	Vic	(03) 9459 4277

B bushwalking C canoeing M multisports R roading RC rockclimbing S skiing

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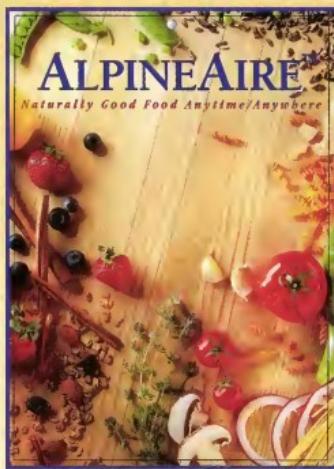
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race was awarded to Muhlegg. Australian Paul Gray finished sixth.

The women's event was won by Hanne Lahtiinen from Finland with Australian Kerryn Rim in second position and French skier Christine Claude taking third place. The men's Australian Birkebeiner was won by Australian Michael Brennan with compatriot Belinda Phillips dominating the women's event.

Glenn Tempest

### Buffalo plan

Proposals announced in the management plan for Mt Buffalo National Park, released earlier this year, include new camping areas at Half Day Bridge and Mt McLeod (which would make overnight walks possible) and a picnic area at the Horn. A more controversial issue was an option to allow limited horse-riding on the plateau.

Glenn van der Knijff

## TASMANIA

### Bush birthday

'Celebrate the past; look to the future' is the theme of the 25th anniversary of the Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service. During the years 1971-1996 there have been many achievements for conservation in Tasmania including the listing of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, extensive restoration work of historic sites and successful programmes to bring the endangered species of orange-bellied parrot and forty-spotted pardalote back from the brink of extinction.

Two new National Parks (Mole Creek Karst and South Bruny Island) will be declared as part of the anniversary year. A series of public events to celebrate the occasion has included interpretive activities in many park visitor centres.

Cathie Plowman

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA

### Nullarbor rockfall

A rockfall estimated at 100 tonnes occurred in Weebubee Cave on 9 October during a visit by a group of South Australian cave divers. No one was in the cave at the time of the collapse but some of the expedition equipment was buried.

Stephen Bunton

## OVERSEAS

### Underground in Asia

During August ten members of the Sydney University Speleological Society and the Wessex Caving Club mounted a reconnaissance trip to the north coast of the eastern Indonesian island of Seram. The island is extremely mountainous, rising to an altitude of over 3000 metres, and has more than two metres of rainfall a year. All the higher areas on the island consist of limestone, making the potential for very deep caves enormous. The expedition succeeded in discovering several big stream resurgences with flows of up to 30 cumecs.

Prospecting in the dense jungle revealed that most shafts are choked with rocks and organic debris, but three large caves were found none the less. Two of these were old streamway passages up to 100 metres high and 10 metres wide. The find of the trip was a 250 metre daylight entrance pitch with an inflowing stream. Further exploration of this promising area is keenly awaited.

In April another group of Australian cavers embarked on a successful caving expedition to Thailand. The major discovery of the trip was an active stream cave (named Tham Nam Tok, or 'Waterfall Cave')



Forestry Tasmania's latest contribution to bushwalking and ecotourism in that State  
Geoff Law

with 21 waterfalls. The expedition, a joint undertaking of the Canberra Speleological Society and the Royal Forest Department of Thailand, spent two weeks looking for caves in the rugged Khlong Ngu River area of Kanchanaburi province west of Bangkok. Seventeen caves were explored and six kilometres of cave passages were mapped.

Tham Nam Tok was found when members of the team investigated a stream emerging from the base of a cliff. Over several days they waded, swam and climbed their way into the cave, discovering two streams, 21 waterfalls and a total of 2.7 kilometres of passage. Team members successfully ascended all the waterfalls (some up to 20 metres high) but were eventually stopped byumps in both streamways.

High concentrations of carbon dioxide severely hampered exploration efforts on a plateau above Tham Nam Tok. In some caves the air was so poor that it was not safe to set foot underground. Even on the surface, high levels of carbon dioxide in a couple of dolines rapidly extinguished butane cigarette lighters used as gas detectors!

CSS members recognised the potential of the Khlong Ngu area during a preliminary visit in 1990. On that occasion they found what is thought to be the world's largest column in the cave Tham Sao Hin. The length of the column is believed to be 61 metres but an attempt on this year's expedition to confirm the height using hydrogen balloons was thwarted by the balloons' lack of cooperation. ☺

SB and John Brush

Readers' contributions to this department, including colour slides, are welcome. Typed items of less than 200 words are more likely to be printed. Send them to the Editor, Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.



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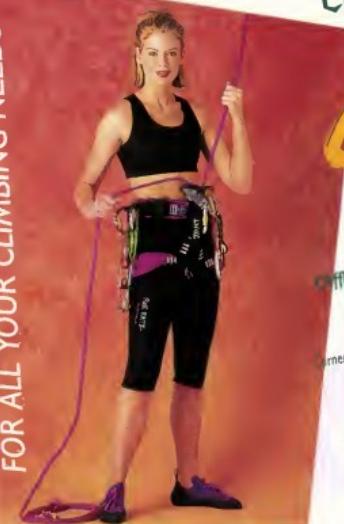


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Front pocket  
Padded-harness back with anatomically shaped shoulder-pads



### 45L & 55L Ruck Sack 5412/5413

Padded-harness back with anatomically shaped shoulder-pads  
Contoured hip-belt  
Top loading with draw-cord storm throat  
Elasticsid lid  
Dual ice-axe loops  
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Side water-bottle pockets  
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Gusseted front pocket  
Roomy top-lid pocket



### 25L Multi-sport Pack 5411

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Side water-bottle pockets  
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### 80L/90L Single Compartment Tramping Pack 5414/5416

Top loading with draw-cord storm throat  
AHS harness system  
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Side and base compression-straps  
Under-lid map pocket  
Roomy top-lid pocket  
Gusseted front pocket  
Sleeping-mat straps  
Double-layer base

**Attached Harness Guide**



### 80L/90L Twin Compartment Tramping Pack 5415/5417

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AHS harness system  
Elasticsid lid  
Dual ice-axe loops  
Side and base compression-straps  
Under-lid map pocket  
Roomy top-lid pocket  
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Sleeping-mat straps  
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Separate sleeping-bag compartment  
Unzippable internal divider

**Attached Harness Guide**

### 90L Adventure Pack 5418

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**Attached Harness Guide**



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# Vroom!

Petrol heads in the winter High Country



● **Ski patrol**

The Victorian National Parks Association is collecting reports of incursions by snowmobiles into the Alpine National Park following the introduction of commercial snowmobile tours at Victoria's alpine resorts last winter. The association has received a number of accounts of ski-tourers encountering these vehicles apparently on recreational jollies well outside alpine resort boundaries despite assurances by the Chief Executive Officer of the Alpine Resorts Commission in a letter in this issue of *Wild* (see page 7) that these tours do not encroach on the National Park. (Snowmobiles are permitted in the park if engaged in police, park management or search and rescue activities.)

In August a *Wild* correspondent met (and photographed) four snowmobiles at Cope Saddle, six kilometres south-west of the Falls Creek resort and well within the boundaries of the National Park. (None of the 'drivers' appeared to be wearing ARC-

or any other—uniforms, something which would be expected if the vehicles were in the park for management or rescue purposes.) The September issue of the newsletter of the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs contains a report of another three sightings near Falls Creek in late July including an encounter with four vehicles on Mt Nelse, even further from the resort. A well-known Victorian bushwalker reported to *Wild* that several times he saw these vehicles within the National Park last winter; on at least one occasion the snowmobile was evidently carrying 'tourists' under the direction of the vehicle's 'driver'.

An article in the September issue of the *Alpine News* quotes one of the commercial snowmobile operators as saying that when he was young he 'used to be allowed to go out and...ride machines out in the high plains...away from the resort. Then when the area became a National Park that all stopped in its tracks.' The article continues: 'When [the operator] was young he used to

Bluff Mountain, the Warrumbungles, New South Wales. A National Park to be thrown open to commercialisation? Roger Lembit

take visitors over to ski Nelse and Mt McKay. "It had always been a goal of mine to get that started again."

If you had an experience like those reported above last winter, see Action Box item 1.

● **The greening of industry**

In an Australian first, industry and the environment movement launched a long-term cooperative project, the Conservation Alliance, in September. Under the slogan 'The Outdoor Industry giving back to the Outdoors' some of Australia's leading outdoors businesses agreed to put a proportion of their gross revenues into a fund for environmental projects. Member organisations pledge 0.1 per cent of their revenues to finance a variety of educational,

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wilderness conservation and other environmental campaigns, many of which might not otherwise receive funding. In protecting the natural environment the companies will also protect the resources on which their businesses depend. The Conservation Alliance in Australia, which was developed as an initiative of the six founding member companies—including Wild Publications—and of conservationists including the organisation's trustee Peter Garrett, is modelled on the US Conservation Alliance which has generated millions of dollars for environmental projects.

#### ● 'Green-cott' gathers pace

Boral became the first company to be targeted under the conservation movement's new national strategy to convince consumers to boycott the products of environmentally insensitive businesses. Claimed to be the second-largest exporter of native-forest wood chips in the country, Boral is responsible for the wood-chipping of logs extracted mostly from the forests of South west Tasmania and New South Wales. Boral products which consumers are being urged to boycott as part of the campaign include: Blue Circle Southern Cement, Boral bricks and Boral Besser masonry, Midland bricks, Bringelly clay pavers, Boral gas, and a range of plasterboard including Unispan, Wet Area Board/Firestop, Shaftliner, Plasterboard, Windsor and Basebond 60 and 90.

The second company on the movement's hit list is packaging giant Amcor (formerly APM). The focus of the boycott campaign is that company's well-known office- and copying paper, Reflex. A spokesman for Environment Victoria, one of the participants in the 'Corporate Consumer' campaign, said: 'If Amcor continues to woodchip Victoria's Central Highlands for the next 30 years it will be an environmental disaster. Every Australian can prevent this by refusing to buy Reflex paper. We can all make Amcor a responsible corporate citizen that does not use native forest wood-chips and produces genuine recycled paper.'

See Action Box item 2.

#### ● Seeing is believing

A survey by the Australian Heritage Commission has confirmed that the overwhelming majority of Australians believe in the preservation of wilderness. Ninety-nine per cent of those surveyed believe that wilderness should be conserved, 97 per cent believe in the conservation of our wild rivers, 98 per cent believe that there is a duty to save wilderness for future generations, and 87 per cent consider that wilderness should be preserved for its own sake. Bushwalking in wilderness areas was judged to be appropriate by 90 per cent of respondents, meeting greater approval than any other activity.

Glenn van der Knijff

#### ● Water threats

The CSIRO has warned the Federal Government of an increasing risk to the quality of the continent's inland waterways. A report to the Prime Minister's Science

and Engineering Council identified blue-green algae outbreaks—which have been linked to the overuse of chemical fertilisers—and agricultural chemicals as the most pressing threats to the health of natural water-systems across the country.

## QUEENSLAND

#### ● Glasshouse Mountains to be quarried?

The Glasshouse Mountains are the most distinctive landmark on the Sunshine Coast and are an important destination for bushwalkers and climbers. A recent decision by the Caloundra City Council, whose logo is dominated by the mountains, will allow a 100 per cent foreign-owned company to expand its quarrying activities right to the base of Mt Coonowrin (Crookneck). Already a large column has collapsed on the classic grade-16 rockclimb up the east face of Crookneck. The views from the area's lookouts and many peaks are already badly compromised but this pales into insignificance when contemplating the eventual 70 hectare black hole which the quarrying is to produce. (The company's response is to paint the quarry's walls black to make it invisible!) A local community group will be fighting the council and the company in the Planning and Environment Court and they believe that they have an excellent case to overturn the decision.

See Action Box item 3.

## NEW SOUTH WALES

#### ● Warrumbungle?

The new management plan for the Warrumbungle National Park appears to open the door to commercial accommodation within the park as part of a blueprint which includes nine development sites within its boundaries. These are likely to include camping grounds and cabin complexes. The plans have been formulated despite the proximity (a 15-minute drive) of commercial accommodation at Coonabarabran.

#### ● New forest parks

The State Government has announced the creation of ten new National Parks and Nature Reserves as part of its forestry reform package. The new parks include a 120 000 hectare South East Forest Park covering forests in the controversial Eden woodchip concession area.

The other nine parks are in northern NSW. They have a total area of 45 000 hectares and include Mt Royal National Park in the Barrington Tops area, Chaelundi National Park in the Dorrigo River area, the Nymboida Bin-

Despite the fact that damage by four-wheel-drive vehicles to Australia's High Country is widespread, the New South Wales Government is bowing to pressure from the four-wheel-drive lobby. (This photo was taken on the Bogong High Plains, Victoria.) Chris Baxter

deray National Park—which includes part of the Nymboida River—and Bellinger River National Park adjacent to New England National Park.

The government also announced that over 670 000 hectares would be deferred from logging pending further assessment to establish a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system. These deferred forest areas include the most productive old-growth forest remaining in the east of the State.

Twelve new wilderness areas in total exceeding 150 000 hectares have also been declared. They include extensions to the Nadgee, Budawang, Macleay Gorges, Washpool, New England and Guy Fawkes wilderness areas. The establishment of a \$5 million Milo Dunphy Wilderness Fund to support acquisition of private and leasehold land for wilderness additions was also announced by the government.

However, the July issue of the Colong Foundation's *Colong Bulletin* reports the displeasure of this important conservation organisation at the latest round of wilderness declarations by the Carr Government. Major criticisms include the extent of the concessions made to the vocal four-wheel-drive lobby and the failure of the wilderness declarations to exclude horses from those sections of the Bicentennial National Trail which pass through wilderness in the Macleay Gorges, Werrikimbe and Barrington Tops areas. The latter concession was announced by the National Parks & Wildlife Service despite the disputed sections of trail constituting only 1.6 per cent of its total length and the pledge in 1988 by those who conceived the trail that incursion into existing and future wilderness areas would be avoided.

The Colong Foundation is urging the government to reconsider the impact of such damaging recreational activities in wilderness areas. To join it in its defence of the integrity of the State's wilderness declarations, see Action Box item 4.

Roger Lembit and the *Colong Bulletin*

## AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

#### ● Horse damage

The ACT National Parks Association has expressed its concern at damage to the





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environment at Mt Morgan in the north-east of Kosciusko National Park caused by horses and their riders. The association has complained that commercial horse-riding parties have caused a rapid deterioration of the area's wilderness qualities by turning a faint foot-pad into a braided, eroding track during the last two years. Large fire circles are also said to have appeared at the summit during this time.

Mt Morgan lies close to the Bicentennial National Trail, a major horse-riding route. The NPA suggests that the trail be re-routed away from the fragile alpine summits of Mt Morgan and Half Moon Peak to reduce pressure on the area and enable the extension of the Goodradigbee wilderness to include the mountains.

RL

build an extensive ski village on Mt Stirling. Rino Grollo, had 'gone cold' on the idea, fears are still held that EES support for such a development would guarantee the construction of yet another alpine resort in the State's High Country.

Meanwhile, the Minister for Conservation & Land Management, Marie Tehan, announced in October the establishment of a number of reviews into the operation of the State's alpine resorts, including possible changes to planning and management regulations as contained in the *Alpine Resorts Commission Act*. The review panels—which are made up almost entirely of downhill ski interest stakeholders and assorted 'bean counters'—are to focus on competition policy, commercial development and planning. There is no indication that



## VICTORIA

### ● Otway report victory

The Wilderness Society won a court victory in August when it forced the State Government to release a report into the occurrence of myrtle wilt disease in the Otway Ranges in the State's south-west. The Department of Natural Resources & Environment had refused to release the report—which the society claimed would support accusations that myrtle wilt was being spread as a result of poor logging practices—for two years. The airborne disease has reached epidemic proportions in the heavily logged Oways and fears are held that the region's last remaining stands of temperate rainforest will be wiped out within a few years. After studying the released report, the society claimed that it significantly differed from a version of the same report leaked to it before the court's decision and had been subject to 'substantial deletions' and watering down of recommendations.

### ● Mt Stirling decision imminent

Public submissions for the environmental effects statement investigation into the development of Mt Stirling closed in late August with reports that an overwhelming majority of the submissions favoured little or no development on the mountain.

Despite reports earlier in the year that the principal developer behind proposals to

Victoria's Wongungarra River valley, spared from logging? Peter Chew

the panels will make their reports available to the public.

### ● Wholesale forest destruction continues

The percentage of the wood taken from the forests of East Gippsland which winds up as wood-chip continues to increase following the Federal Government's decision to raise wood-chip export quotas to record levels (see Green Pages, *Wild* no 62). The most recent issue of the Concerned Residents of East Gippsland newsletter *Potoroo Review* notes that despite assurances by the logging industry that its activities are 'saw-log driven' there has been a 40 per cent decrease in sawn timber produced from native forests during the last 20 years while the volume of wood-chips taken from native forests has increased by 230 per cent!

In September the Wilderness Society condemned the long planned construction of a gas pipeline through East Gippsland's forests by BHP. While supporting the prospect of the resulting reduction in greenhouse-gas emissions, the society argued that an alternative route through central Victoria and NSW would spare the forests and only entail the construction of a few hundred kilometres of new pipeline.

### ● Wongungarra wilderness

Victorian conservationists welcomed the decision by the Minister for Conservation & Land Management in October to place a moratorium on logging in the Wongungarra valley near Mt Hotham in the State's north-east. Although not the same as permanent protection the decision places on hold plans to log what has been described as 'Victoria's last remaining unprotected wilderness'. The Wongungarra, home to the highly endangered spotted tree frog and long-footed potoroo, was recommended for protection in 1992 but inexplicably never declared as a wilderness area. The Wilderness Society is pressing the government to add the valley to the adjacent Alpine National Park. See Action Box item 5.

## TASMANIA

### ● Road hogs

Those who have climbed Tasmania's Frenchman's Cap in clear conditions will have noticed an ugly, white scar running across the mountains to the south-west.

## Action Box

Readers can take action on the following matters covered in Green Pages in this issue.

- 1 Make a report of your encounter to the VNP, 10 Parliament Pl, East Melbourne, Vic 3002; or phone (03) 9650 8296.
- 2 Write to the Managing Directors of Boral (GPO Box 910, Sydney, NSW 2001) and Amcor (Southgate Tower East, 40 City Rd, South Melbourne, Vic 3205) and ask those businesses to cease their logging operations in old-growth forests immediately.
- 3 Contact the Glasshouse Mountains Advancement Network, PO Box 282, Glasshouse Mountains, Qld 4518 or you can telephone Bill Thompson on (07) 5496 9490.
- 4 Contact the Colong Foundation for Wilderness, Gloucester Walk, 88 Cumberland St, Sydney, NSW 2000 or telephone the foundation on (02) 9241 2702, fax (02) 9241 1289.
- 5 Express your desire to see the Wongungarra added to the Alpine National Park by writing to the Minister for Conservation & Land Management, Marie Tehan, Parliament House, Melbourne, Vic 3000. To help the Wilderness Society in its campaign, contact Kate Kennedy on (03) 9670 5229.

- 6 Write to the following ministers and urge them to stick to the legal management plan for the WHA and close the Mt McCall road: Robert Hill, Minister for the Environment, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600; Peter Hodgman, Minister for the Environment, Parliament House, Hobart, Tas 7000.



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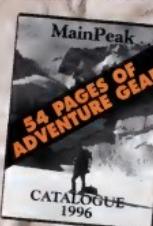
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This scar, the Mt McCall road, was bulldozed nearly 30 years ago by Tasmania's Hydro-Electric Commission to provide access to Propsting Gorge on the Franklin River where the HEC intended to build a 200 metre high dam that would have flooded the Great Ravine. History shows that the HEC was prevented from flooding the Franklin, but the 20 kilometre long eyesore of the road cutting into the heart of the World Heritage Area is still there. While it remains open it is a conduit for the spread of bushfires, pests, weeds and diseases.

Under the 1992 WHA management plan the Mt McCall road is to be closed and rehabilitated in 1997. This is a statutory management plan, and therefore has the weight of law.

Both the State and Federal Governments are under intense pressure from the pro-logging Forest Protection Society, local tourist operators and some rafting companies to ignore the plan and keep the road open. The most prominent adventure-travel company pushing for the road to remain open is Peregrine Adventures. Wild, in keeping with its ethical advertising policy, does not accept advertising for trips that entail the use of the Mt McCall road (see Editorial, Wild no 60). This decision resulted in Peregrine withdrawing all advertising from Wild. Editor! The Wilderness Society has criticised Peregrine for joining with Tasmanian 'redneck' elements to oppose the full implementation of the management plan for the WHA. In late September a spokesperson from Peregrine publicly debated the closure of the road with Greens senator Bob Brown—the former Director of the Wilderness Society who led the campaign to save the Franklin in the early 1980s.

The decision over the fate of the road has been delayed by the State minister responsible until March 1997.

Now is the time to have your say on this important issue. See Action Box item 6.

*Geoff Law*

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA

### ● Burning issue

The Western Australian Conservation Council demanded in June that the State auditor-general investigate the supply by the Department of Conservation & Land Management of old-growth jarrah logs to a local silicon smelter. The council insists that the agreement constitutes 'a massive and economically indefensible misallocation by CALM and the State Government of a highly valuable resource' and that high-grade, old-growth jarrah logs are being sold to the smelter—which burns them to produce charcoal—for as little as \$7.00 a tonne.

Earlier, the smelter's owners cancelled at short notice a planned tour of inspection by two representatives of the Conservation Council.

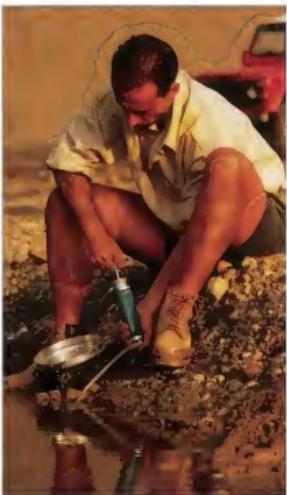
*Barbara Booth*

Readers' contributions to this department, including colour slides, are welcome. Typed items of less than 200 words are more likely to be printed. Send them to the Editor, Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.

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# Eyes in the wild

We are not alone out there, by Quentin Chester

There are more than 120 islands in Bass Strait. The majority are marooned mountain tops, remnants of the range that once tethered Tasmania to the mainland. Most are granite islands with smooth buttresses and huge domes of grey stone. There are, however, a few exceptions. One is a solitary island lying 30 kilometres off the north-western tip of Tasmania. Here the rock is a conglomerate, with rounded lumps of quartzite fused within a rich, brown basalt. When you get up close it has the appearance of dark chocolate studded with nuts.

When approached by boat this island is a stirring sight. The burnished texture of the rock, the swell heaving into the coves and the walls looming 100 metres out of a dark sea give the place the appearance of a fortress. On a brisk autumn morning I scrambled ashore and worked my way through a dank cave to a rocky amphitheatre in the heart of the island. Even those with only the vaguest yearning for windswept outposts couldn't fail to be impressed.

However, as I clambered up the walls to the island's upper reaches, the scene changed. The summit ridge is terraced with ledges and every square centimetre of level ground is taken up by nests. On each of these basin-shaped plinths sat an adolescent shy albatross—the birds that give this island its name. There were several hundred of these fledglings in residence. They sat preening the feathers on their chests and flanks. I spent a couple of hours tiptoeing among these splendid birds, at times lying down nearby so that I could see the world from their perspective.

Later in the day I wandered away from the nests into the lee of a steep ridge. Gazing across the island's lumpy flanks to the expanse of Southern Ocean beyond, the impression was of limitless space. In some ways the view presented itself as a bare canvas on to which one could project feelings of solitude or freedom—or whatever.

Yet turning round and looking across to all the nests gave a very different impression. The insistent clacking and clamour of the fledglings, the sky above the island filled with the soaring, wheeling shapes of adults returning from their day's feeding in Bass Strait, dominated the scene. It was impossible to see the island simply as



an inspiring spectacle or as some convenient backdrop for my experience. Whatever I might have wanted to think or feel, this island belonged to the birds, it was *their* home. At best I was a privileged onlooker.

In recent times I've had reason to visit quite a few such locations: places where wildlife has an emphatic, humbling presence. These have included the offshore strongholds of several sea birds. I've also spent time in the domains of black-footed rock wallabies, Australian sea lions, greater stick-nest rats, northern quolls and central netted dragons—to name just a few. Each of these encounters has been compelling and a little unsettling at the same time. In various ways they have forced me to consider my attitude to wild creatures and the realms they inhabit.

For a start, why has it taken me a lifetime to grasp the richness of living things that occupy the kind of places I've made a habit of visiting? Why also was I never told that Australia is home to so many species of, for example, native rodents including some of the most endearing creatures you're likely to meet? For that matter, why does wildlife rarely make much more than an incidental appearance in a magazine devoted to matters wild?

These kinds of questions become more baffling when you consider how truly

Not-so-demure shy albatrosses on Albatross Island. Quentin Chester

remarkable our native fauna really is and the opportunities that exist for getting 'up close and personal' with such creatures. I, for instance, grew up in a suburb with bush all around. However, apart from chortling magpies and the occasional glimpse of a sleepy lizard near the backyard Hills Hoist, wildlife barely seemed to impinge on my childhood imagination.

Even when I began to wander wider in the outdoors, any appreciation of living things was mostly accidental. Initially I was preoccupied with getting used to being in the bush. Then for many years I was propelled by the urge to push myself further into wild country, to grapple with steepening heaps of rock and to attempt a plausible Telemark turn. To a large extent the bush served as a kind of proving ground for my chosen rites of passage.

On those occasions when other species did impinge on this demurring do, it was usually for their nuisance value or as some cute interlopers. So, for example, at camping grounds there was the odd scavenging goanna or possum scrabbling and hissing in nearby trees. Occasionally I was the indignant victim of attacks by

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determined rodents that gnawed through protective fly-sheets and Cordura packs in search of tasty morsels.

Given the hundreds of hours I spent perched high on belay ledges I suppose it is little wonder that birds made the strongest impression. At Norton Summit, Adelaide's steepest suburban crag, terrifying attacks by peregrine falcons were par for the course. Similarly, from eyries on Wilpena Pound I was the object of keen-eyed scrutiny from wedge-tailed eagles riding the up draughts off the surrounding walls. For all the excitement of these visitations, they aroused only fleeting interest. Such was the grip of the task at hand that I never thought much about the relationship of these winged hosts to places I was in, or why, for example, the peregrines' attentions were so ferocious.

In some ways this indifference is hardly surprising. There was very little encouragement in school or elsewhere to take an interest in our indigenous species. I was raised on stories about cunning foxes and cotton-tailed rabbits. No one told me about the kinds of creatures I might find in my own backyard. There were a few wildlife books and documentaries, but most celebrated the majesty of the great animals and sharp-fanged predators that roamed the African plains and other distant lands.

By contrast our native animals were often portrayed as oddballs or comic curiosities. Who ever heard of a beak-faced, egg-laying mammal? What about those dopey emus and dumpy little wombats? Indeed, my most durable childhood images of Australian wildlife were from the Bugs Bunny Show: notably the rampaging Tasmanian devil and the 'giant mouse' that terrorised Sylvester. Apart from these caricatures and the spectre of snakes and sharks, I grew up with a notion that the continent was inhabited by innocuous herbivores. As Tim Flannery opines in *The Future Eaters*, this notion that our native species were somehow inferior did no harm to those who sought dominion over the land.

Not only are the local critters regarded as just a little peculiar. They are also maddeningly hard to set eyes on. Given that most Australian mammals are strictly nocturnal and incurably shy it is little wonder that you rarely see more than a grey blur or a skinny tail disappearing into the shrubbery. Of course it wasn't always necessarily this tricky. Australia's appalling record of extinctions, particularly of small to medium-sized mammals, has not made it any easier to appreciate the richness of our fauna.

Yet despite all these difficulties wildlife has gradually asserted its rightful claim on my curiosity. Simply by spending more time sitting, looking and listening, a number of clues have come my way including assorted tracks, scats and even the occasional pair of eyes staring back. By pausing for a moment I have been jolted by the realisation that a grey lump on a shaded branch can, in fact, be a tawny frogmouth. By tuning into the

sounds of the night I have come to recognise that a certain eerie evening cry is the voice of the quaintly titled beach thick-knee. Similarly, I get a buzz from sighting the tracks of a euro or looking at the carefully constructed entrance to a mulga ant nest.

This immersion in a busy world of signs and sounds has become something to seek, as though I were cruising nature's own Internet. And these days I'm happy to find myself outnumbered by other species. I enjoy the feeling that I'm being watched. At times the clues are confusing but to see one's curiosity being reciprocated is reassuring beyond words. Suddenly you are incorporated into a living place.

Of all the creatures that have helped to bring me to my senses, it was the yellow-footed rock wallaby that got me going. These appealing creatures were once widely dispersed through South Australia's Flinders Ranges. Competition for habitat and feral predation have greatly reduced their numbers. Only isolated colonies remain, sequestered deep in the heart of the ranges. Furry, shy and vividly coloured, they are the epitome of what biologists somewhat dismissively describe as charismatic megafauna.

What struck me most about these animals was not so much their cuddly cuteness but the ease with which they moved over steep ground. The first time I saw one of these wallabies bound lithely over tottering scree and spring across sloping ledges of a rock outcrop it took my breath away. At that moment I knew that nothing I could do in similar terrain would ever come close to such effortless mastery.

These encounters were a doorway to another world and a more intricate way of looking at the country. Around the same time I began to travel with people who possessed an uncanny ability to identify individual species. These names, be they common or Latin, descriptive or cryptic, transformed the jumbled clutter of plants and animals into a welcoming place populated with characters, each with a tale to tell.

Such recognition is a delight in itself. At the same time it prompts a concern for the relationships between living things, their habitats and the cycle of seasonal events. Terms like 'ecosystem' somehow fail to capture the earthy vigour of all these interactions. One moment the connections seem delicate, even tender, the next they turn manic and bloodstained. It's the kind of world that is hard to imagine when you're at the top, or to one side, of the food-chain.

Yet it is only by learning the names for things and looking for the relationships that this reality begins to emerge. Ultimately it becomes a habit of mind, an instinctive response to one's surroundings. I know I'm still well short of this sharpness of observation. But at least I know enough to appreciate travelling with people who do have these powers.



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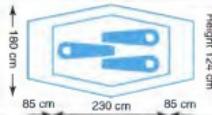


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One of the most surprising of these journeys was in Witjira National Park on South Australia's northern border. The park is famous for its mound springs, natural eruptions from the artesian basin that create spectacular oases in a parched landscape. It was no surprise to find a rich congregation of wildlife around these lush waterholes. The surrounding country appears a lot less promising with its expanses of gibber plain, bare clay plains and dune ridges. One of the continent's great minimalist landscapes, it makes Albatross Island look like a rococo mansion.

Even to the trained eye much of Witjira appears stark and devoid of living things. In the space of a few days, however, this forbidding place revealed itself to be rich with life. Admittedly I was in the company of field biologists, yet even they seemed amazed. We turned up many small mammals, including the fat-tailed Dunnart, desert mouse, paucident planigale, plague rat and Forrest's mouse. There were numerous species of gecko, skink, dragon and goanna and the occasional snake. And not forgetting the bats and water-holding frogs. Nor the 60- or 70-odd bird species that were spotted. Or the untold number of invertebrates we collected.

To see such abundance and diversity unfolding in the daily rounds of traps and habitats was like being part of some elaborate conjuring act. Except that this was no trick, but the magical reality of adaptation to a hostile land by a host of creatures who work the margins of survival. For me it was a telling reminder that there is so much to learn and appreciate. It also brought home just how much has to be done to ensure that this astonishing diversity is not squandered.

Yet it's also worth remembering how far we have come. In 1798 Matthew Flinders and George Bass became the first Europeans to visit Albatross Island. Searching for fresh meat to supplement the ship's rations, Bass went ashore armed with clubs and returned laden with birds and seals. (Such carnage was perpetrated on a much more hideous scale three decades later when thousands of birds were slaughtered for their feathers.)

In his journal Flinders noted that the albatrosses did not fear Bass for they were 'unacquainted with the power and disposition of man'. He added, 'we taught them their first lesson of experience'. Two hundred years later we are faced with the troubling consequences of our power. Perhaps through the compelling experience of places like Albatross Island a new disposition will emerge. Perhaps we can learn the lesson of seeing eye to eye. ☐

*Quentin Chester*  
Quentin Chester (see Contributors in Wild no 3) writes regularly about going bush. He is the co-author of *The Outdoors Companion, The Kimberley-Horizon of Stone* and is present working on a book which explores the diversity of 28 Australian islands from the tropics to the sub-Antarctic.

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# Walking comfortably

Track tips, by Glenn van der Knijff



**W**hen I first went bushwalking about 20 years ago I thought that walking comfortably meant using a rucksack with padded shoulder straps, eating tinned food and drinking real milk. I thought that sore shoulders, heavy packs, blisters and cold sleeping were integral parts of bushwalking.

We used to carry maps, baked beans, a pot and a frying-pan, a full assortment of cutlery, a spare woollen blanket to accompany our cotton sleeping-bags, the obligatory bottle of Coke, and heaven knows what else. We didn't carry sleeping-mats (we slept on the grass), 'waterproof' parkas or headlamps. We were young and inexperienced but thought that we carried all the 'right' things. How misinformed we were! It wasn't until I'd been walking and camping for some time that I discovered a few tricks of the trade and began to appreciate the real joys of walking.

If you've had some experience you will probably be familiar with most of the basics of travelling comfortably (such as to carry as light a rucksack as possible) but for first-timers and the less knowledgeable the basics may not be so obvious. While it is possible to burden yourself with the items mentioned above, walking and camping in comfort doesn't necessarily mean bringing the luxuries of home with you. But neither does it mean having to go without all of them. A common-sense approach is called for, especially with regard to planning your outdoors adventure and while in the wilds.

## BEFORE YOU GO

Before venturing out into the bush you can do a number of things that will make the trip easier.

With the right gear and the knowledge of how to use it you can be comfortable in the most unlikely places. (Near Mt Jagungal, Snowy Mountains, New South Wales.)  
Glenn van der Knijff

## Planning

The planning process has been covered in detail by Quentin Chester in Outdoor Skills in *Wild* no 62. Have a look at his notes and take heed of the following tips.

Make sure that you have good topographic maps of the area you intend to visit and familiarise yourself with the terrain in which you're planning to walk so that you are aware of any long, steep climbs or overgrown creek valleys which may slow your pace. On flat, easy ground you should expect to cover about four kilometres every hour-less in scrubby

conditions. Bad weather will slow you down further so allow extra time to compensate for this. When climbing steep hills, you can probably ascend at a rate of around 300 vertical metres an hour. The general rule is not to attempt to travel too far or too fast and to allow plenty of time for rests, drink stops and for taking photographs.

When studying the map and the planned route, look for reliable sources of water. Take note of where the track crosses creeks and rivers. If there are few water points, fill up all your water-containers so that you don't run out in the middle of the next 'dry stretch'.

If just starting out in bushwalking, you should not only ensure that the planned walk is of short duration but that you have allowed for any emergencies which may entail returning to your vehicle by an alternative 'escape' route. Study the maps and plan ahead.

#### Check your gear

It is all very well to have the correct gear, and to pack it all nicely, but do you know how to use it? Ascertain that the 'life and death' items are in good condition (tent, sleeping-bag, stove) and that all parts are in proper working order. Check the number and condition of tent-poles/pegs (and don't forget to pack them!) If you've borrowed gear such as a stove or a tent from a friend (which is often the case when one starts out), be sure that you know how to use it. Check that you have brought the correct fuel for the stove (Shellite? Methylated spirits? Kerosene?) It is also wise to learn how to pitch the tent quickly (in case it is raining) and in the dark (you may arrive late at the camp-site).

#### Packing

Keep a list of everything you're going to need until you've packed a rucksack often enough for the list to be stored in your memory. You must have all the basics (see *Outdoor Skills, Wild no 60*) before you start packing any extras. Satisfy yourself that you have everything before you leave home; you don't want to find that you have forgotten to buy food when you are two hours into the walk. And it can be a rude shock to get to the camp-site only to discover that you've forgotten tent-poles or sleeping-bag.

Pack soft items behind the harness and sharp, bulky items away from your back otherwise you'll be walking in extreme discomfort.

Fragile gear will need to be properly protected. Keep electrical items (such as a mobile phone or an automatic camera) dry, and protect delicate foods (eggs and tomatoes) inside something solid like a billy or a pot.

In eastern and south-eastern Australia it is a good idea to use a pack liner or a large, strong plastic garbage bag to line the inside of the rucksack to keep everything dry should it rain.

While many rucksacks have straps and loops for attaching items to the outside, use them sparingly. Attempt to pack gear such as sleeping-mats (which can tear in scrub) and clothing (which can fall off) inside the rucksack.

#### Keep essentials handy

The order in which you pack the rucksack is critical. The essentials must be easily accessible. Check the forecast weather conditions to decide whether you're likely to need a parka. If so, keep it near the top of the rucksack.

Snack food and lunch should also be easy to get at, as should your drinking-bottle.



How you pack your rucksack will have a significant effect on your comfort in carrying it. (The heaviest items are darkest in this illustration.)

Your tent, poles and pegs should also be easy to get at. Some rucksacks have a divider near the bottom which essentially divides the pack into two parts. (The bottom part is usually reached by way of a zip.) If your pack has a divider, store the tent in the lower compartment. This way if it is wet when you reach the camp-site the tent will be easy to retrieve. If you've packed it in such a way that you have to unload the entire contents of the rucksack to get to it, you may end up with very wet gear.

Carrying a headlamp near the top of the pack is handy, too, if your party has to set up camp in the dark.

For those who wear glasses it is worth while to invest in an anti-fog coating for them (useful in cold climates) or you may decide to keep a small cloth in your jacket or rucksack pocket to wipe away any moisture that forms on the lenses while you are puffing up hills in cold conditions. Similarly, keep a spare pair of glasses on hand.

#### Sharing items

Tents, stoves, fuel, first aid kits, and gear-repair kits can be shared among the group. Tents are usually shared in pairs (unless the tent is large) and a stove with its billys and utensils can be shared between two or three people. If you intend to share a tent with one other person, you may wish to carry the tent while your partner takes the stove, fuel, tent-poles and tent-pegs. One first aid kit and one gear-repair kit is usually enough for a party. Apart from containing general items, if one member of the group has special requirements that person should carry those items him- or herself.

#### What to take

Make sure that you have the correct clothing for the conditions you are likely to experience. Be prepared for cold, rain, wind, scrub, sun, heat, and sunburn. Although you are unlikely to get all these in one weekend anything is possible, especially in the mountains, so check the weather forecasts. Detailed information on dressing for the bush can be found in *Outdoor Skills in Wild no 61*.

Try to carry lightweight utensils such as reusable plastic plates and cutlery. Throw in a number of plastic 'supermarket bags'—these are good for keeping clothing dry and they can be used as rubbish bags for carrying out tins and wrappings.

## ON THE TRACK

#### Walking

As your feet are your means of transport they are probably the most used and abused part of your body when bushwalking. Hence they need to be looked after. As soon as blisters begin to form, tape them up. Don't wait that extra hour—by then it'll be too late. Trim your toenails beforehand or you'll feel the pain, especially on those long, downhill stretches when your feet slide forward in your boots. Once your boots are worn in (an important process!) take note of where they rub and 'tape up' before you begin walking. Bootlaces tend to loosen after walking a short distance (reducing foot support), therefore retie them regularly.

Confident that your feet are fine, you can get on with the task—walking. A steady pace with a good rhythm is less tiring than a fast one which makes you

get out of breath and take lots of rests. You may think that you are travelling more slowly but you'll find that you need fewer rest stops and will have more time to appreciate your surroundings.

When tackling steep climbs, remember that smaller steps use much less energy than longer, awkward ones. This may seem illogical, but try it and you'll see that it works. Your friend with the big strides will probably need more rests and will be less refreshed than you when you reach the top.

On wet ground traction will be greatly reduced. Watch each step carefully, especially on climbs and descents. Do not step on logs or bark (unless you are *absolutely* sure of your footing) as they are coated with a greasy layer when wet and become as slippery as ice. Slipping, twisting or wrenching your ankles, knees or groin become far more serious when carrying a heavy load.

The pace at which you feel comfortable walking will be determined by how much weight you carry. Most people with whom I walk find that if their rucksack weighs more than 20 or 25 per cent of their body weight they feel uncomfortable. Only experience will determine the right weight for you but when starting out try not to carry more than 20 per cent of your body weight on your back.

#### Walking tracks

Inexperienced walkers should try to keep to walking tracks as the going will be relatively straightforward and navigation should not be a problem. When you are confident in navigating off formed tracks remember that ridges and spurs are usually less scrubby than creek- and river valleys and provide easier walking. Also, north-facing slopes are normally drier and more open than damp, southern slopes. Keep this in mind when planning to 'bush bash'.

#### Water

In warm or hot conditions—or in the snow when liquid water can be hard to come by—drink as much as possible before you start out and fill your drinking containers. Before embarking on a long, hard climb or a walk in hot conditions I drink as much water as I can. This might mean sitting by a stream and gulping down as much as two litres of water. It's not easy to do, but it will keep you going for a long time before getting thirsty. Carry enough water to last to your next water-point, keep your water-bottle accessible and drink regularly.

You may not need it often, but a lot of walkers nowadays carry an empty wine bladder (usually the four litre size). It does not weigh much when empty, but if you

plan to travel for a whole day without crossing a stream (or if water is unreliable) fill it up with water. Carrying the extra weight is better than becoming dehydrated. Wine bladders are also handy to store water around camp, rather than using bowls and billies.

#### Eating

I will not go into detail regarding what food to take on bushwalks. This topic has been covered in many articles in

become lethargic, tired and irritable and your outdoors adventure will feel more like hell than like a holiday. Refer to Wild Ideas in *Wild* no 36 for more detailed information on food.

#### Staying dry

Unfortunately, for many Australians rain is a common companion on their bush-walks and other out-



previous issues of *Wild* (see *Wild* no 58 for a free booklet, *Cooking for the Bush*). Suffice it to say that eating (and drinking) regularly is essential. So is pausing for snacks, especially when you are active, because the body burns up fuel rapidly and this fuel needs to be replaced. While main meals are important, equally important are 'snacks for tracks', which might include chocolate, peanuts, muesli bars, fruit, cheese and scroggin (a mixture of nuts, dried fruits, chocolate, sultanas and just about anything of your choice). Without eating regularly you will soon

be doors activities. Considering this, it is important for rain not to be seen as the enemy. You can, in fact, learn to appreciate rain and the effect it has on the environment. However, to do this you must stay relatively dry. Carry a good waterproof parka. In summer you may never need it but even in south-eastern Australia it can get cold and wet at any time of the year. Gaiters will help to keep boots and feet dry but after a prolonged wet spell you should resign yourself to ending up with wet feet. (It is wise to waterproof your boots with a waterproofing agent—many varieties are available from outdoors shops.) Waterproof

overpants will help but you can live without these unless you plan to travel into 'extreme' areas.

The loss of body heat in cold and damp conditions is slowed down if you manage to remain dry. And as head, hands and feet have the potential to lose more heat than any other parts of the body ensure that you keep them dry and that as soon as you begin to feel cool you put on a warm hat. If you're heading into cold areas, keep gloves or mittens accessible—either in your rucksack's outer pocket or in your parka pocket.

It may not be easy, but try to keep mud and water from zips and Velcro. Mud will

comfort level—neither too hot nor too cold. Adjust layers when necessary.

Personal experience will help you to determine what is sensible dressing that will keep you comfortable in the outdoors.

## AT THE CAMP

### Camp-sites

It is important to select a sheltered camp-site away from the wind and well protected from the weather to keep you comfortable when camping out. Look for a site surrounded by trees, or at least with trees to the windward side. (Be aware of the possibility of a sudden switch in wind direction accompanying a change in the weather.) Boulders make very good wind-breaks. Try not to camp directly beneath the limbs of trees, however, as they can break off and damage you (or your expensive tent); if it is wet the trees will drip noisily on to the tent and you won't get much sleep.

While you will usually find the flattest ground on ridges tops it is best to look for level ground below the main ridge line if the weather looks changeable. Avoid wet-looking areas near swamps, creeks and heath. When the tent is

pitched, take the time to peg out all the guy ropes. And before you go to bed tension all ropes so that the tent is secure in case the wind increases—flapping doors will annoy you when you are trying to sleep. More detailed information on selecting and establishing a camp-site will appear in *Outdoor Skills* in a future issue of *Wild*.

### Dry clothing

In cold areas in particular the most important reason for staying dry is to prevent exposure and, ultimately, hypothermia; body heat is extracted from the body much more quickly if you are wearing wet clothing.

Just as important as staying dry while walking is to have a change of dry clothing when you make camp. Keep clothes in a water-tight plastic bag (or bags) in your rucksack. (If possible, line the inside of the rucksack with a pack liner.) If you arrive at the camp in a damp state, immediately change into dry clothes or you may put your health at risk.

A perennial problem is where to sit when the ground is cold and damp. The easiest solution is to carry a small piece of closed-cell foam mat (about 40 centimetres square)—the same material from

which foam sleeping-mats are made. This will fit easily into the rucksack and weighs almost nothing.

## ON RETURNING HOME

When you return home, prepare your gear for the next trip. If you haven't been walking yourself but have loaned gear to a friend check it carefully before you store it. I once found a fruit loaf rolled in my Macpac Olympus that had been borrowed for a weekend's skiing! (If I hadn't checked it, mould may have ruined my next adventure.)

### Drying

You may have camped in fine conditions but make sure that your important gear is dried properly lest it be ruined by mould. Check that the tent is dry and look for damp spots before storing it. Air out your sleeping-bag and ascertain that it, too, is totally dry. Wash all cooking gear so that it is in pristine condition for the next trip. (Germs may well breed on that billy if it hasn't been cleaned.)

### Gear check

Check all gear for any signs of damage or stress. Take note of where the tent was leaking and have it seam-sealed. Is there any loose stitching on the hip-belt of your rucksack? Are the jets on the stove clogged? These are just some of the things to look out for and remedy before your next trip.

### Notes

When starting out in bushwalking it is often difficult to estimate how much food to take. On your first few trips, take notes of what—and how much—you've eaten and base the next trip's estimates on these. It may save you weight in the long run. Take notes on what went right—and wrong—on those first trips and make adjustments accordingly for future trips.

### Summary

The points I have outlined here are certainly not revolutionary. They are simply basic, common-sense ideas that should help to make your first outings more enjoyable. Much of the information centres on reducing the weight you carry on your back.

While there are no set 'rules' try to follow some of these hints. Then, after some experience, you'll soon find your own ways to make your outdoors adventures as comfortable and enjoyable as possible. After all, pleasure is what we're out there for. 

*Glenn van der Knijff* is a keen bushwalker, cross-country skier and alpine historian. A qualified cartographer, he has worked for Victorian map and guidebook publisher Alionna Publications. Most recently he spent eight years on the staff of *Wild*.



**Left,** it's important to keep your cool in hot weather. Andrew Cox. **Above,** blisters are no joke to the bushwalker. Darren Rayment

make them difficult to use and water can freeze and make them useless. (Getting Started in *Wild* no 21 gives excellent, detailed information on how to stay dry in the outdoors.)

### Dressing sensibly

In *Outdoor Skills* in *Wild* no 61 Monica Chapman told us how to dress for the bush. Dressing sensibly is the name of the game. While you need to be prepared for just about anything, use a bit of common sense. If the wind is cold, wear a parka. If it is hot, don't wear too much. At altitude, cover up so as not to get sunburn. Try to avoid sweating too much (through walking too fast) as this will make your clothes damp and cold when you stop, particularly in the mountains. Wearing layers—following the 'layering principle'—is recommended. For example, wearing four thin layers is better than wearing two thick ones. Start off with four layers (or as many as you think are necessary at the beginning of the day) and remove clothing one layer at a time as you warm up so that you remain at an optimum

# THE OVERLAP THE NATION

A Wild feature on Australia



wild bushwalking

# WILD TRACK N D N O W

best-loved walking track



# THEN...

John Béchervaise writes of a freezing journey from Waldheim to Lake St Clair in the early 1950s

You must take it in winter, take whatever comes and keep moving. for the mountains are as stern as they are alluring and will certainly discomfort anyone who underestimates their quality. It is so in the Alps of the southern mainland; in Tasmania—more remote, more rugged and of higher latitude—the statement is underlined. The mountains, however, should not brood unvisited under their snows. They hold rich reward for the well prepared.

In summer, hundreds of walkers have taken the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair track, and it has deservedly become known as one of the finest walks in Australia. The thin, sinuous track passes for nearly 60 miles (11 miles = 1.6 kilometres) through grand mountain and forest country, past lakes as clear as a cloudless sky, over high tundra with a magnificent skyline of jagged peaks to give location and below dim rainforest glade. When night comes travellers may dump their packs in a warm hut, eat and sit by a great log fire, and recuperate on a bracken-strewn bunk. Money cannot buy the joy of the walker; northward or southward bound, coming to the end of the track refreshed in mind and body.

Only a handful have ever seen the great reserve in winter. The first summer visitors gather up the fuel left by the last wayfarers of early autumn. Six months' leaves and twigs, made sodden by the snow and many inches of rain and days of blizzard, have obliterated their footprints. Winter has renewed the wilderness, cast down the infirm trees, rejuvenated the mosses and cushion plants, replenished the highland tarns. When the echoes of the summer hikers' feet are distant, when frosts split the rocks, when great rains overflow the streams in wild, white spate or night-long drifting snow silences everything, there is a special reward for the intruder.

We made our plans for an August visit with several contingencies in mind. To cope with any kind of weather we topped our normal woollen clothing with special 'parkas' of double-nylon fabric cemented with thin, flexible rubber solution. These were of a material and pattern under tests by the Antarctic Division, who were anxious to know how we should find them. After a lot of discussion we decided against skis in favour of a sort of snowshoe-cum-ski of our own manufacture. Thin boards of Burmese cedar, light and tough, approximately three feet long by ten inches wide

[1 foot = 30 centimetres; 1 inch = 2.5 centimetres], were steamed to the required shape and furnished with leather bindings. These 'scuds' (as they were christened) would be lighter to carry, we thought, when not in use and more manoeuvrable with heavy packs in soft snow. Realising that we would be by no means certain of reaching the huts at night, we equipped ourselves with light snow-tents (with 'floors' of waterproof material sewn in).

Two very light Primus stoves, photographic equipment, first aid kit, 120 feet of Beale's alpine rope and an ice-axe completed our gear, and we had food for eight days. Our heavy, oiled boots were soled with moulded, hard rubber in a manner which is gaining considerable favour amongst climbers abroad. The pattern of the indentations follows the usual arrangement of edge clinker nails and triple hobs. It was claimed that these soles would grip on wet and dry rock alike and that they possessed the very great advantage of not 'balling' on wet snow. The only disadvantage of our equipment, in spite of the most careful scrutiny and assessment, was its weight. Distributed justly between the four of us, it averaged just over 70 pounds [1 pound = .45 kilograms] dry weight (the last word being highly relevant to the planned itinerary).

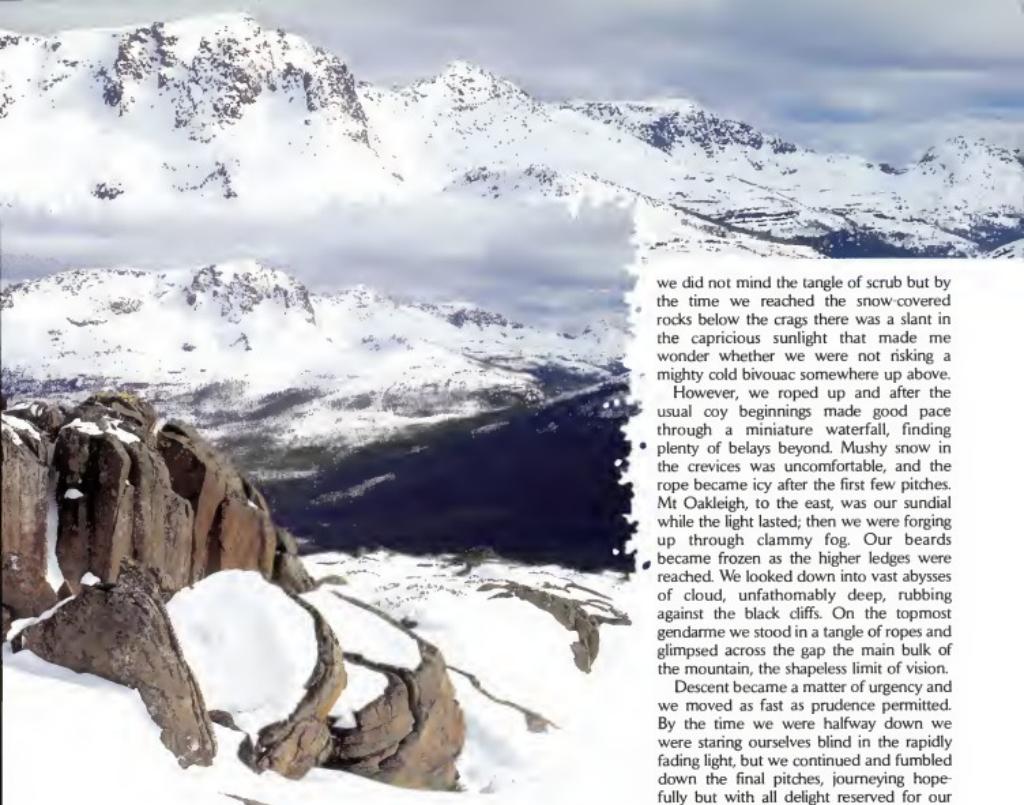
Fred Elliott, Bruce Graham and I, looking as though our destination might well be a thousand miles further south, met the fourth member of our party, Tasmanian Geoff Sharman, at Launceston airport. Bill Bewsher, who had been breaking his neck to be with us, had fallen down a mine-shaft and broken his wrist instead, but he came along a little disconsolately to see us on our way. He would be waiting to welcome us at Cynthia Bay, too, after the trek was over. John Taylor drove us out to Valleyfield for a last hospitable evening, a little disturbed as it happened by our preoccupation with 'scud' fastenings and last-minute riveting. Long before dawn our host had us breakfasted and eating up the miles to Waldheim. Whether we should ever reach the start of our hike intact was freely debated.

However, an hour sooner than the waving roads had promised we were southward bound on foot with the good

wishes of McCracken the ranger, the envy of Bewsher, and the direst predictions and unfeeling scorn of Taylor, who had helped to lift down the packs from his truck. The mist soon obscured the past and the future alike.

Our disappointment at not finding heavy snow at the start was a trifling hollow, for the going was hard enough with such packs on shoulders out of training. We reached the moors and through rifted clouds glimpsed the serrations of Cradle Mountain, seeming aloof and fantastically high, for the misty atmosphere caused the illusion of great distance and consequent immensity. When we camped in the early afternoon just below the Cradle, though the air froze the open pools the sun was clear on the golden-yellow dolerite columns. Unburdened and light-hearted we surrendered to their appeal and for as long as possible climbed round the beautiful rock and hard névé of the summit. Snow, shadowed blue, was plastered down the southern faces, but beyond, except for an occasional, gloomy vision of Barn Bluff—a shape rather than substance—there was no visual forecast of the morrow.

Northward lay Lake Dove, never lovelier than in the valley shadow of a clear winter day. For a few minutes we sat in supreme



contentment, puzzling out our tents amid the welter of fallen monoliths beneath. Melbourne existed less than 24 hours away in time, but in another world. *Facilis descensus Averno*...we forgot the thought and descended thankfully to our tents. A few bright stars winked down at our campfires. Soon the weather's welcoming respite was over; little balls of sago-snow pelted out of the blackness in which only our tents and the hard ground had any reality.

Next day was execrable, cold and gusty all the way round the cirque overlooking Mt Brown, until late afternoon again heartened us with a sunny vision of Windermere. Mt Pelion West showed clearly a few miles beyond, and we were glad of our ropes, anticipating its alluring cliffs. But the day had been tough, with packs biting into shoulders being trained the hard way—no practice between them and city desks—and we were thankful at the thought of shelter. Our halts had been brief, tussles between the gale and desire; views had been circumscribed, and we had grown a little weary of even the warm-hued cushion plants and variegated tundra at our feet.

Down in the Windermere valley, trees screened the wind and offered fuel. Surely awaiting us, but much further along than

Winter transforms the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park (Mt Ossa, Tasmania's highest peak) Rob Blakers. Pages 42 and 43, Barn Bluff, right, from Cradle Mountain. Page 47, the way to go. Grant Dixon

memory promised, was the pine-wood hut. No one had entered it for months, but it was dry and the bracken in the bunks smelt of the previous summer. The last footers had rightly left plenty of wood, and we soon augmented easy fires with big, slow-burning logs from the forest. [Readers are reminded that all Tasmania's World Heritage classified wilderness is now a 'fuel stove only' area. Editor!] We reviewed the day over a steaming stew and scalding coffee and decided to climb Pelion on the morrow. Soon we sank into the fern, and neither the howling wind nor the scamperings of an outraged possum in the smoky rafters disturbed our rest.

The seven miles to the foot of Pelion West lay over high moorland, very rough and uneven with button grass and tussocks forming little, insecure islands in a sea of mire. We had underestimated the time factor and ate our lunch just below the long, wooded ridge leading to the northem tower. At least the ridge was *terra firma* and

we did not mind the tangle of scrub but by the time we reached the snow-covered rocks below the crags there was a slant in the capricious sunlight that made me wonder whether we were not risking a mighty cold bivouac somewhere up above.

However, we roped up and after the usual coy beginnings made good pace through a miniature waterfall, finding plenty of belays beyond. Mushy snow in the crevices was uncomfortable, and the rope became icy after the first few pitches. Mt Oakleigh, to the east, was our sundial while the light lasted; then we were forging up through clammy fog. Our beards became frozen as the higher ledges were reached. We looked down into vast abysses of cloud, unfathomably deep, rubbing against the black cliffs. On the topmost gendarmerie we stood in a tangle of ropes and glimpsed across the gap the main bulk of the mountain, the shapeless limit of vision.

Descent became a matter of urgency and we moved as fast as prudence permitted. By the time we were halfway down we were staring ourselves blind in the rapidly fading light, but we continued and fumbled down the final pitches, journeying hopefully but with all delight reserved for our arrival. The ridge was familiar territory even in the black night though we celebrated our departure from it by lighting an enormous fire and drying our sodden clothes. It was hard to leave that blaze and trudge slowly over seven miles of freezing moor. A bright moon came out and breathed ice over the land, but we crunched through it into stinking bog half the time and staggered uncertainly home. The day was most worth while, as it rests in my memory, after the hut fires were kindled.

Kinder weather gave us a pleasant ten-mile carry to the new Pelion Hut. All the peaks were covered in snow, but our route lay wet and gleaming with sunlight. For a while the wide Forth Gorge lay blue below us, falling away from an abrupt scarp on the level of the moors to misty depths of forest so dense that progress there could only have been made by track cutting. We had all experienced the torment of dense Tasmanian scrub and it was pleasant for a change merely to contemplate it from afar. The short day brought dusk for the last miles. That night we wondered, not for the first time, whether our 'scuds' were really worth carrying.

The steep climb to the Ossa Saddle, all of us sweating like mules through the beautiful myrtle forest, strengthened our doubts. We were more than halfway through the mountains, and the sun glinted on the fallen bronze leaves and in the trees

like millions of stars. We were lulled, in spite of experience of the Tasmanian winter, into a sense of security and when we camped on the northern, wooded brow of the pass we erected our tents on little, grassy knolls, preferring mountain climbing to the labour of laying platforms of saplings as the site and season strictly demanded. We spent a joyous afternoon scrambling on the abrupt little pinnacle of Pelion East and practising with our 'scuds' on large snowdrifts on the side of the mountain. Burdened with unburdened men, they provided exhilarating exercise and plenty of fun. Southward, innocent white clouds scurried through the valleys of the Du Cane Range. Somewhere beyond the Du Cane Gap lay the Narcissus River valley, Lake St Clair, and the end of our journey.

From complete darkness our fires that night excavated small spheres of warmth and light and we had only just completed our meal when the rain started. We soon drifted to sleep while our tents were beset by icy torrents which, once started, offered no sign of cessation. Once or twice Fred and I stirred and mumbled something about the rain. It roared down relentlessly as though a concentration of all Tasmania's wettest clouds lay above our mountains. Half awake, we heard the gathering of streams and the rush of water all around us but being high up on a mountainside offering excellent drainage we didn't worry much. The finely spun alpine tents sprayed a little, but this held no particular worry. My tent, with 'stocking' entrances and a well-sewn groundsheet of stout canvas (it was actually constructed for Himalayan climbing), seemed invulnerable.

The first faint greyness was welcomed by even more violent rain if that were possible. I peered out from the tent. The very mountainside was awash, inches deep. Already water was trickling determinedly into one corner of the tent. Surely, instead of mere trenching, we should have built our platforms. The trickle gathered to a steady stream. Something would have to be done swiftly if we were to breakfast in peace. Fred lit a Primus stove and filled a billy from the sloping lake that was the world outside. As I crawled from my sleeping-bag a fountain of water leaped beneath the tent; I had been blocking a subterranean watercourse with my body. For about an hour, as it reluctantly grew lighter, I fought a losing battle with the streams, ditching with an ice-axe while Fred prepared a meal. Even our nylon parkas, although waterproof in themselves, were only partially successful in that deluge. Apparently the weight of the packs had frayed small patches on the back and shoulders. Such rain, now an inch an hour, needed no other invitation to seep inside our outer coverings.

Bruce and Geoff were also having their troubles, but they were actively on the job and expected no sympathy. The 'drill' was to pack gear while anything remained dry (for two reasons—weight and future comfort), swallow a meal and get on the

track. So it happened that while the day was very young, very dark and incredibly wet, we moved over the pass and into the Pinestone Valley. Probably the wet weight of our packs will remain our record for a very long time. But we shall look back without pride or pleasure at the achievement.

New problems beset us, for all the streams were unbridged, cataracts deep and several yards wide, desirous of sweeping us and our packs well down towards the Mersey River. In the incessant rain we felled trees, dragged them to the uncertain banks and toppled them athwart the torrents. On several occasions they were carried away but in the end, with trees and ropes and back-breaking toil, we crossed the valley. Few summer trampers could ever envisage the gentle Kia Ora as a dangerous flood, churning great boulders beneath its spume. Sodden through and through, loads biting into shoulders, we made the high Du Cane Hut in the early afternoon.

Draughts and more exposed than that of Windermere, it nevertheless provided the ultimate contrast to the previous 24 hours and well lived up to its traditional title, 'Windsor Castle'. We coaxed tiny flames until they mounted and filled our world with radiance and heat. Stripped naked, our bodies absorbed their benediction while our clothes slowly steamed and recovered with us. Inch by inch our sleeping-bags were dried out and life became rosy in the present and in anticipation. From the dripping forest we dragged big beech and old pine logs, glorying in the task of building a night that must intimidate any weather. The rain ceased in the late afternoon and a heavy gloom, silent and cold, overspread the ranges. Once the darkness came we were immured by the flickering, orange pine slabs, eating enormously, telling great tales boastfully, and ready for slumber. Tomorrow should be a rest-day, and sleep before idleness has an added incentive.

We woke incredulously to heavy snow. A new, fantastically lovely world held bowed branches and gentle hummocks. From the sombre forest peered out old, bearded faces contemplating us in the great silence of whirling snowflakes, black against the sky. Somewhere in the upper air the wind had veered; now, instead of the grey, depressing rain, nature provided her most fragile handiwork—feather fine, dry crystals—to transform the jagged land. We were content to linger and all day the silence grew more intense as the little streams ceased flowing and froze beneath the snow. Another night's rest equipped us for the last stages of our journey.

The ascent to the Du Cane Gap lay for some distance through a strange twilight beneath the matted trees. Below the big timber our progress was fast and we did not even worry about our 'scuds'; later, in the small scrub with the snow falling steadily, it was unpleasant as our forward movement was through soft drifts and bridges linking the invisible bushes. With an ice axe we

belted the undergrowth, snow springing in all directions until relieved of its burden, the scrub stood erect and let us move between. It was hard work floundering and we soon donned our 'scuds' when altitude and more open country caused the new snow to lie three yielding feet in depth. Even so supported we sank deeply, and progress became a matter of exhausting hours per mile. The choice lay between an early camp and a major effort to reach the Narcissus Hut at the head of Lake St Clair; after discussion we decided on the latter course.

Hour after hour we plodded on steadily, very weary but determined to reach our objective. With dusk, route finding became difficult and the intensifying greyness flattened out all the pitfalls of the track so that we often stumbled. We did not use our torches until all light had gone. Taking turns at track breaking gave each man a little relief. Finally Sharman, who knew the country very well, made a valiant spurt, the rest of us following his clear trail. Several times on the flats he cast round in circles, instinctively seeking some opening in the scrub or depression in the ground that might jog a summer memory. We reached the hut an hour before midnight.

The snow again impeded our progress for the final day round Lake St Clair although, owing to the very low water line, it was possible for miles at a time to follow the shore rather than toil over switchback spurs. The problem that did occur on several occasions was to regain the track when for any reason the lake margin became impassable. Once it took more than an hour through soggy, bowed scrub.

There were great compensations even to the toil of the last day. The erect pinnacle of Mt Ida was a glory in the changing lights across the lake, and distance gave a great tranquillity to the stormy peaks now receding far behind us. In the icy waters of Lake St Clair, dozens of platypuses, leaving long, barbed wakes, frolicked almost unconcerned alongside the blue-shadowed snow.

Again darkness found us still trudging, first through the deep, dripping beech forest, later on firm snow between eucalypts. A light from the hydroelectric station at Cynthia Bay winked cheerfully, seeming no distance across the dark lake. Suddenly we found footprints sharply defined by torchlight—Bewsher's, we had no doubt—and later a note from Bewsher telling us where to locate a hospitable reception at any hour. Five hours behind schedule we were sleepily welcomed, and within 24 hours we were back in Melbourne. 

John Béchévere, whose account of the Overland Track in winter first appeared in *Walkabout* magazine in July 1952, was for many years a teacher—in the UK, at Geelong College, and later at Geelong Grammar School—and guided students on adventurous journeys to many parts of Australia. He led exploratory expeditions to Antarctica during the 1950s and has travelled, climbed and explored widely. He is a writer and poet with many published works and was for a time co-editor of *Walkabout*. He is now retired and he and his wife Lorna live in Geelong.

# THE TRACK TODAY

**Cathie Plowman describes Tasmania's most popular walk**

**m**ost Australians have been awed by photographs of the Tasmanian wilderness. While many feel that they are not up to the challenges of this often harsh and demanding environment, others are less cautious and dash into the wilderness ill prepared. Though still demanding a moderate degree of fitness and exertion, the Overland Track provides an easier option for becoming acquainted with Tasmania's mountain landscapes. This celebrated walk can be enjoyed by less experienced walkers who are reasonably fit and prepared for the wide variety of Tasmanian weather conditions.

Restoration works along much of the track have protected the environment and made walking easier. However, wet and muddy sections of track are still encountered. The environmentally conscious walker will wade through these rather than widen the affected area by skirting around them!

Nine public huts along the track provide varying amounts of space. In the popular months the huts are generally crowded and cannot be relied upon for accommodation. If camping, walkers are encouraged to do so near the huts where there are established camp-sites and (with the exception of Du Cane Hut) a toilet.

## When to go

The months of December–April are recommended to walkers inexperienced in Tasmanian conditions. These months have long daylight hours and warmer average temperatures. However, rapidly changing weather conditions can occur at any time of the year. These can include snow, sleet, howling winds, relentless rain and blazing sun. Combinations of these are the norm and all the above can be experienced in a single day. (The author has been snowbound for up to three days in both November and February.)

Wild flowers are at their peak in December–January. January also brings the greatest number of walkers. The crowds ease off by mid-February; by late March the frequency of frosty mornings is on the increase. During April masses of Tasmanian walkers come out to watch the changing colours of the deciduous beech and to have a walking finale before winter sets in.

## Maps

*Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair Map and Notes 1:100 000 Tasmap.*

### Further reading

Welcome to the Wilderness is a free trip-planning guide available from Parks & Wildlife Service centres.

*The Overland Track—A Walkers' Notebook* is a popular, pocket-sized booklet of 80 pages for walkers intending to visit this famous track. The book contains notes on the ecology and history of the area, helpful snippets of information for walkers and illustrations of birds and animals likely to be seen along the walk. Ten pages of colour illustrations of wild

flowers are a highlight of the book. A second edition is being prepared at present and will be ready for the coming walking season. It is available from outdoors shops and the Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service for \$9.95.

#### ● Access

The track can be started at either Lake St Clair or Cradle Mountain. The majority of walkers begin from the north but this option has no special advantage over starting from the south. To suit the majority, these track notes have been prepared using a north-south route. (Walkers beginning at the south end of the track can still follow the notes by 'working backwards').

Bus transport is available throughout the year from Hobart and Queenstown to Derwent Bridge (five kilometres from Lake St Clair); to Lake St Clair from Hobart; to Cradle Mountain from both Launceston and Devonport; and from November to April to Lake St Clair from Launceston and Devonport. Private charters can also be arranged. Check with the operators listed below for fares and timetables.

#### ● Useful contacts

##### Parks & Wildlife Service:

- Lake St Clair (03) 6289 1115
- Cradle Mountain (03) 6492 1133

##### Camping and accommodation:

- Lake St Clair (and ferry transport) (03) 6289 1137
- Cradle Mountain (03) 6492 1303

##### Transport:

- Maxwell's Coaches (03) 6492 1431
- Tasmanian Wilderness Transport (03) 6334 4442
- Tigerline (03) 6234 4077 or phone 1800 030 620

#### ● The walk

Walkers have a range of options to leave Cradle Valley, with several tracks beginning at both Waldheim and Lake Dove. I prefer to start from Waldheim. From here the main tracks go either past Crater Falls and

Lookout. Several other tracks leave from Lake Dove but these are mostly steep and well worn and do not give easy access to the Overland Track. They are more suitable for day walks for those based at Cradle Valley.

Walkers leaving Cradle Valley should allow four to five hours to reach the first Overland Track camp-site at Waterfall Valley. (Times indicated in these notes are

contains several islands with vegetation which has been protected from bushfires. The many bleached, white trees in the park are testimony to the effects of bushfires. Unlike on mainland Australia, many plant species here are not adapted to fire and are slow to recover from its effects. Some species cannot recover.

The walk from Windermere to the Pelion Plains (five to six hours) will be the longest



## the walk at a glance

### GRADE Moderate

LENGTH Four-six days (80 kilometres)

TYPE Mountains, lakes, moorlands, waterfalls, rainforests, wild flowers, fauna, history

REGION Central Tasmania

BEST TIME December–April

### SPECIAL POINTS

No camp-fires permitted. Park entry fees charged. Tents should be carried by all parties

Crater Lake to Marions Lookout and thence to the Overland Track or along the Horse Track to Crater Peak and the Overland Track. From Lake Dove the main access to the Overland Track is by way of Lake Lilla and Wombat Pool to Marions

walking times only and do not include rest breaks, photo stops and the like.)

All the tracks join just before Kitchen

Hut (a small, day-use-only shelter). From here a side-trip can be made to the Cradle Mountain summit (see below) or you can wander on to Waterfall Valley (approximately two hours away). This section of track includes walking on the rim of a large glacial cirque.

Two-and-a-half-hours south of Waterfall Valley is Lake Windermere. This large lake

Pinnacle of achievement: on Mt Ossa. *Stephen Curtain. Right, two heads are better than one. (At Waterfall Valley)* Tim Burke

day for most walkers. This stretch of the track crosses exposed moorlands that offer little protection from extreme conditions. If it looks like a hot day set off early as there are few trees until you reach Pelion Creek. In cold conditions keep snack food handy to limit stopping times. There are dozens of tent-sites in the grassy surrounds of Pelion

Hut. A sunny swimming-hole near Old Pelion Hut will provide a refreshing respite on a hot summer day. At dusk the section of track between these two huts is an ideal place for animal spotting.

From Pelion Hut the track winds its way up to Pelion Gap (about one-and-a-half hours' walk). Those who wish to climb Mt Ossa will have a long day of walking and should get an early start so that they've got plenty of time to rest and enjoy the views.

Naturally, the higher you climb, the further you can see. But those not intending to climb Mt Ossa can still enjoy magnificent views from Pelion Gap (depending on the weather). In January the Pelion Gap area is a delight with flowering scoparia (a heath) and its varying shades of cream, pink, red and orange.

From Pelion Gap the track descends in a leisurely manner to Pinestone Creek, and from there into the Kia Ora valley. From Kia Ora the track leaves the open, wind-swept country behind and makes its way through a variety of forest types. The historic Du Cane Hut is nestled below Castle Crag opposite Cathedral Mountain. In summer the area around the hut is especially blessed with flowering leatherwoods.

## Enjoying the weather

The unavoidable truth about Tasmania is that weather conditions vary regularly. It is understandable that most walkers want fine weather both for the sake of comfort and to enjoy the breathtaking scenery around them. Consequently, many walkers are disappointed when they encounter rain and low clouds. If you're prepared for all weathers and accept whatever comes your way, you're bound to have a more enjoyable trip than if you spend the (very likely) wet times being too disappointed. Change your trip to suit the weather. On wet days, leave the mountain summits behind and instead seek out waterfalls and sheltered forests.

The good thing about the country is...that we don't have any bad weather at all—only a number of different kinds of good.

Joseph Wood Krutch

After Du Cane Hut the track slips into rainforest where tall, stately King Billy pines can be seen. The best way to find them is to watch out for pine needles along the track which announce that one of these impressive trees is towering above you. From Du Cane Gap the track descends through forest dominated by Tasmanian alpine yellow gum. The colour of these trees is especially vibrant in wet conditions.

Windy Ridge Hut is about three hours from Du Cane Hut. Of all the huts, this one has the most limited camping opportunities. The best camping here is near the site of a

previous hut (destroyed by fire) about five minutes north of the present one.

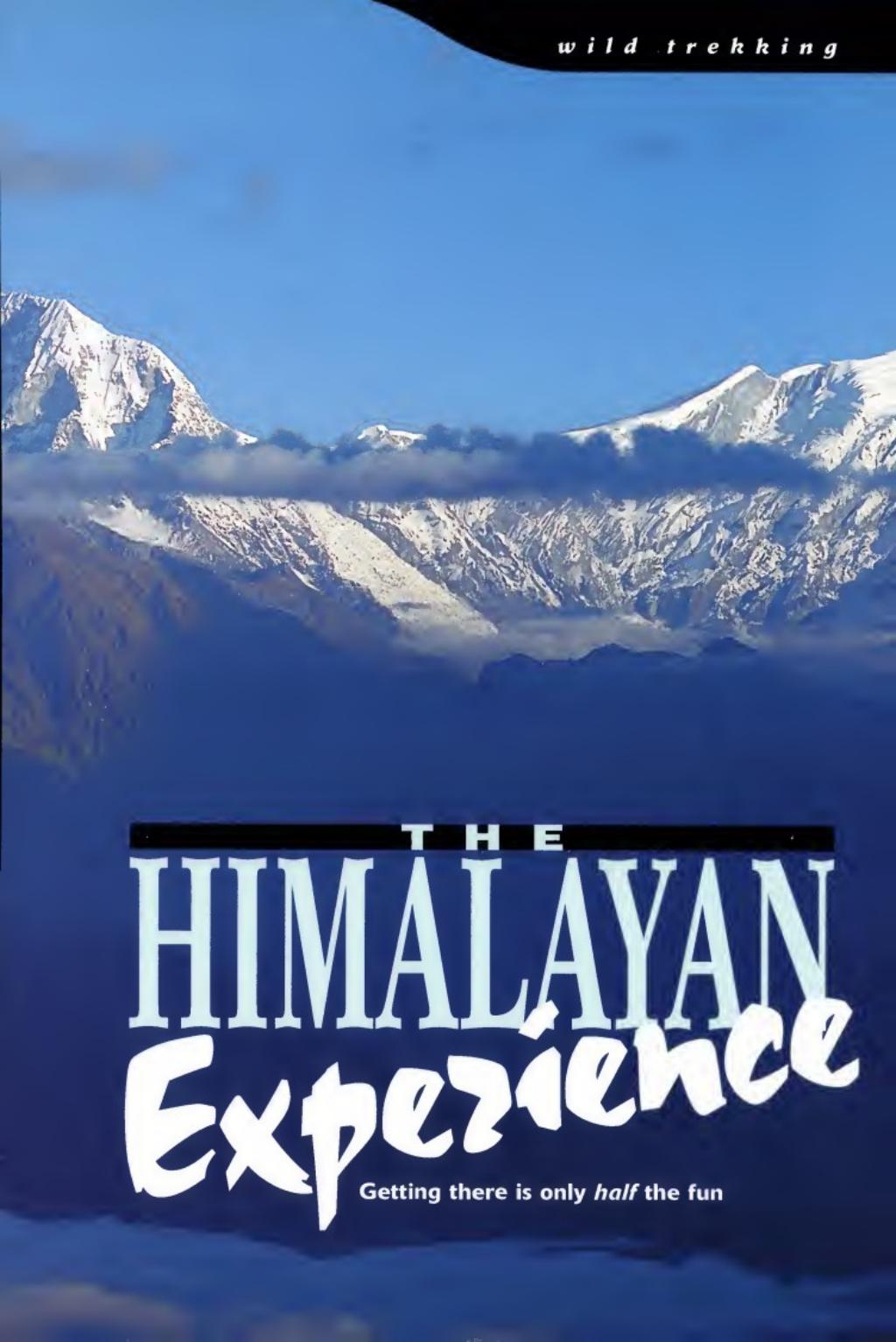
Windy Ridge Hut is in the top of the Narcissus valley, which eventually widens and deepens to contain Lake St Clair.

From Windy Ridge Hut it is an easy, three-hour stroll to Narcissus Hut on the northern shore of Lake St Clair. Along the way the mountains of Mt Geryon, the Acropolis and Mt Gould are passed and eventually the grand sight of Mt Olympus heralds the proximity of Australia's deepest lake (167 metres).

Many walkers opt for ferry transport across Lake St Clair to Cynthia Bay, where the Overland Track meets the lake's southern end. Ferry transport can be arranged by using a radio in Narcissus Hut. Those who wish to walk the entire Over-



w i l d t r e k k i n g



A wide-angle photograph of the Himalayan mountain range. The foreground shows dark, forested slopes. In the middle ground, several snow-capped peaks rise against a bright blue sky. A thin layer of clouds hangs between the mid-ground and the background peaks.

**THE**  
**HIMALAYAN**  
**Experience**

Getting there is only *half* the fun

# WHERE MOUNTAINEERS Begin TO CLIMB



**Trekking in the  
Annapurna region,  
by Gregor Jordan**

The road from Sunauli on the Indian border to Pokhara in central Nepal lazily crosses a vast monsoon flood-plain before ascending into the heart of the world's highest mountain range. With sudden paddy-fields to the left and right, the Himalayas appear at first as a distant, corrugated silhouette on the horizon directly ahead. The air is heavy and hot and the travelling is slow but two hours later the mountains are looming high, rising as the journey progresses. I notice that they are not normal mountains—not like anything I've ever seen. Wider, higher. An hour later and they're right there. Confronting me. The bus is like a beetle as it starts its winding ascent, in and out of ominous, black shadows, crawling round one slope

with a valley tumbling down to the left, timidly creeping towards the higher peaks ahead. The hum of the diesel engine is nothing more than a murmur to the ageless silence of the mountains. I humbly remark to the Nepalese gentleman next to me how incredible the mountains are. 'Mountains? Not mountains. These only foothills. Foothills! I can't believe it. It seems that I will have to travel much further to experience "real" mountains.'

I walked out of my guest-house on my first morning in Pokhara and was struck dumb by the sight of a huge, white, pyramid-shaped mountain—named Machhapuchhre—that seemed to stand just behind the nearby hills. It was my first taste of a 'real' mountain and it was something I'll never forget. Machhapuchhre is part of the Annapurna mountain range north-east of Pokhara. The Annapurnas consist of six snow-clad peaks of over 7000 metres and on a clear day they are easily visible from

Trekkers dwarfed by Kanteega, Nepal. Nick Groves. Pages 50 and 51, Dhaulagiri (8167 metres) viewed from the Annapurna massif. Grant Dixon

the centre of town. My plan was to trek to the Annapurna Base Camp, which lies at the centre of the range.

The striking thing about Pokhara is the scenery. The town is situated between three lakes and is surrounded by rambling pipal and sal-covered hills. When I arrived in mid-September after a heavy wet season Pokhara was warm and green and the air was fresh. It lies at only 884 metres above sea level and is at the same latitude north as Brisbane is south so the climate there is subtropical monsoon. The peak trekking seasons are October–November and March–April. At Christmas the cold winters, and in the summer monsoons the very heavy rains, make off-season trekking



a bit too hazardous. Arriving at the trailing edge of the monsoon, I hoped to avoid the heaviest rain as well as the growing crowds of trekkers. Nepal has approximately 286 000 visitors each year, making tourism its most important industry. But when I arrived the mood was peaceful and other travellers were fairly scarce.

When I was in Nepal the locals talked a lot about James Scott, the young Australian lost in the Mt Everest region for 43 days; he has become an example to trekkers of what can go wrong. Trekking unaccompanied is risky at the best of times but in December, when the tracks become covered in fresh snow, trekking solo is definitely pushing one's luck. Arriving in Pokhara alone, I began to seek out trekking partners. I met a Canadian couple who were keen to head out to the Base Camp, so we agreed to go together. However, one of them was suffering from a mild fever, delaying our departure by several days. One night, as we sat having a drink in a small bar in Pokhara's lakeside district, my Canadian friend began to sway in his seat, complaining that he wasn't feeling well. Suddenly, he collapsed in a quivering pile, urinating all over the floor. The quiet atmosphere of the room was transformed into one of chaos and in a frantic state we rushed him to a hospital. The doctor was quick to diagnose typhoid. In a country as beautiful as Nepal it is easy to develop a sense of complacency, but one has to remember that on the basis of gross domestic product it is the fourth-poorest country in the world. Although figures such as these are questionable in their relevance and accuracy, Nepal's health and hygiene standards are certainly very low by Western norms. Thanks to a course of antibiotics my Canadian friend lived, but he couldn't trek anywhere that year. Luckily I met some other people—Australians this time—who were heading my way and a departure day was set.

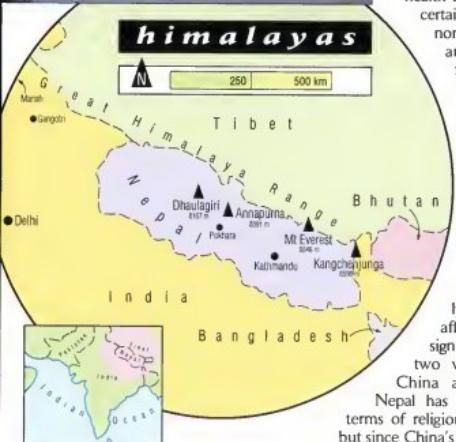
Nepal has been governed since 1991 by a democratic parliament under a constitutional monarchy. It keeps a fairly low profile in world affairs but is geographically significant in that it separates two vast population centres—China and India. Traditionally, Nepal has been closer to India in terms of religion, culture and commerce but since China's take-over of neighbouring

Tibet, Nepal has developed a stronger political relationship with its northern neighbour due mainly to the emergence of a popular Communist Party. Our trek was to begin in a small village called Birethanti, a 40-minute journey by truck from Pokhara. However, on this particular day Nepal's Communist Party—named Sun for the illiterate voters—organised a transport strike that involved every truck, bus, car and rickshaw. On that day absolutely nothing moved. One wonders about the political power of a group able to pull off such a coup. Our trek had to be postponed until the next day.

One of the most appealing aspects of trekking is the feeling of independence. I loved the sensation of freedom in having all my worldly possessions contained in a rucksack on my back. They consisted of a change of clothes, a sleeping-bag, a rain poncho, a piece of twine, a basic first aid kit, a water bottle and my camera. This may not seem much but when it's all loaded on your back it is plenty.

In the mountains is a network of villages, most of which are there for the purpose of supplying food and accommodation in the trekking season. These villages are only accessible by foot and thus all supplies—building materials, food, water, even beer and Coke—must be carried in on people's backs. Needless to say the Himalayan Nepalese are amazingly fit people. Gurkha tribesmen are highly valued as soldiers by the Indian and British Armies. Paths through the mountains, though well worn, are rocky and treacherous and incredibly steep. The first day's trek was through lush rainforest with ferns and rhododendrons and many clear-water streams. High temperatures left our clothes completely soaked in sweat and at the top of one soul-destroying hill I sat gasping for air as though I'd been punched in the stomach, hardly able to see because my eyes had filled with sweat. Trudging up the same hill came several Nepalese porters carrying on their backs bundles the size of fully laden supermarket trolleys. 'Namaste' (Nepalese for 'hello and welcome'), they said effortlessly. Unable to speak, I just raised my hand and nodded.

Geologists theorise that India was once a large island forced into the mainland of Asia by the northward movement of a great geological plate. The collision and resultant forces caused the floor of the ancient dividing sea to surge skywards to become the Himalayas, which we are told are still rising at a rate of two millimetres a year. Evidence to support this theory are the fossilised sea shells that the Nepalese try to sell you as you trek through their villages. I thought it bizarre that something intended to demonstrate that the area was once flat and below sea level should add weight to your pack and thus make your ascent of the towering mountains that much more difficult. However, I found other aspects of the Himalayas' geological idiosyncrasies that were more useful. There are volcanic hot springs in certain parts of the moun-



tains. One such spring, close to the village of Chomrong and next to a particularly ferocious river, had two cement-lined pools with a permanently flowing supply of glorious, warm spring water. Lying in warm water up to my neck after a strenuous day's trek, listening to the unrelenting chum of the river, taking in the smells of the dripping forest, my mind was free to wander. I envisaged health clubs. I imagined people relaxing in spas with gin and tonics after a hard workout in the gym. The lucky buggers, I thought: they get to drive home. I would have to walk.

As we trekked higher and higher we noticed that the vegetation—and indeed the climate—changed around us. The subtropical rainforest and the rice paddies gave way to pine and oak forests. The air became noticeably cooler, especially at night. Noticeable, too, is the impact of humans upon this environment. It was sad to see almost every piece of arable land under some type of cultivation and vast areas of forest cleared for timber. The problem is being addressed to some extent—national conservation parks have been established, with fires prohibited in order to save wood. Since the incursions of the first Himalayan mountaineers earlier this century, when the Annapurna region was virtually untouched, many animal species have become endangered or are no longer seen at all. Tigers, leopards, elephants and an Indian species of rhino—poached for its supposedly aphrodisiac horn—used to frequent the foothill region while in the cooler, temperate zone there was said to exist the almost mythical snow leopard. The Nepalese firmly believe that the yeti, or abominable snowman, stalks these forests and there are stories of yetis carrying away unfortunate villagers. No one has ever produced solid evidence that such a creature exists and I had high hopes of getting a photo of one. (The closest I got was a snapshot of a very hairy trekker.)

One of the perils of trekking during the wet season is getting wet. A large cloud bank slid in one afternoon and proceeded to dump heavy rain on us for the next two-and-a-half days. This made the steep, rocky paths slippery and muddy and, clearly, very dangerous. Gorges a thousand metres deep were only one wrong footprint away. My 'waterproof' hiking boots quickly became completely sodden and at one stop I removed seven bloated leeches from my feet and ankles. They had attached themselves somewhere along the track,

wriggling underneath my socks, and were too slimy to feel. The novelty value of trekking had worn off.

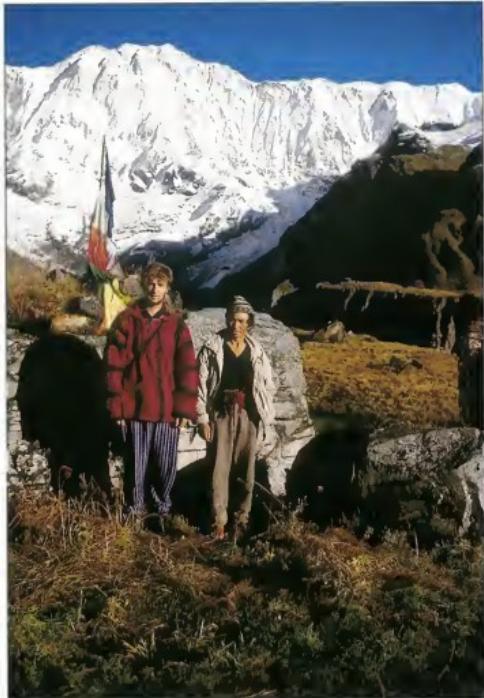
What I hadn't taken into account about trekking was the fatigue factor. In Australia—where our tallest mountain, Mt Kosciusko (2228 metres), would be classed by the Nepalese a mere foothill—we have a hard time grasping the steepness of the terrain. A good day's walk in Nepal may take you 15 kilometres horizontally but also one kilometre vertically. This translates into a lot of very steep hills. Just as you have climbed

ascending too many metres in one day. Lesser symptoms such as breathlessness, insomnia, increased tiredness and mild dizziness are felt by most trekkers. The last two days before the Annapurna Base Camp were hell for me. There were times when I would gasp for air, swaying on the spot, just staring at my foot and looking at the place where it was to go, and then saying to myself, 'Okay now: one, two, three, GO!' I would need all my strength to transfer that foot to its destination. A distance of 100 metres sometimes took ten or fifteen minutes to cover.

On the morning of the sixth day we walked through the last of the bamboo forest and out into alpine pastures. It was wet and cold but open and we knew that we were getting close. When we arrived at Machhapuchhre Base Camp at about 1 pm it was still raining and I felt quite depressed. Machhapuchhre—'Fishtail Mountain'—is a holy mountain that has never been climbed. The religion of the Nepalese is a strange blend of Hinduism and Buddhism and the locals have a strong spiritual relationship with the mountains. That climbing Machhapuchhre is prohibited for religious reasons is a testament to its magnificence. But at the time I didn't care about all that stuff—I couldn't even see the stupid thing. After six days we had barely glimpsed the mountains and there was no guarantee that we would see them at all. It was only about an hour's walk up to Annapurna Base Camp but in our present mood we couldn't be bothered. We decided to stay where we were and spend the rest of the day looking out at freezing drizzle, playing cards and chess and praying that tomorrow would

be clearer than today.

The next morning I awoke at dawn to a cloudless sky. I walked out of my room and was immediately confronted by the sight of mountains all around. Machhapuchhre loomed like a hundred skyscrapers. The rest of the range was still and majestic, not yet lit by the morning sun. I felt real excitement and my heart was pounding as I covered the final distance to the Base Camp. One hour's walk without the burden of a rucksack and I was there. All the effort of the past week had been for this and it was worth it! Wherever I looked there was a towering peak. As the sun slowly rose it lit the snow that covered the mountains and made them glow with a crystalline brilliance. The air was clean and still as the shimmering peaks shone brighter and brighter. The other trekkers were not



The author and a Nepalese porter below Annapurna (8091 metres). Gregor Jordan

one slope and are begging for some flat ground another hill rises up mercilessly before you. It seems as though it's just hill after hill. Added to this is the fact that as you climb the air gets thinner.

Above 3000 metres the cover of fir and spruce becomes less dense and gives way to rocky bamboo forests and the air actually begins to feel thinner. Acute mountain sickness (AMS) is a medical syndrome caused by lack of oxygen at high altitudes and can be fatal. Severe symptoms include vomiting, chronic headaches and coughing blood, but these can be avoided by taking time to acclimatise—that is, to refrain from

speaking, just turning to view one mountain after another, mouths slightly open. As I stood staring at Annapurna I thought of those who have tackled such giants. Here I was at 4100 metres standing at the base of a mountain 8091 metres high, nearly four kilometres of snow-covered rock soaring above my head. How does one attempt to climb such a peak? It took me six days of hell just to get to the place where the mountaineers begin to climb. Things were placed into perspective there and then. Surely these mountaineers are supreme athletes, an ultimate combination of the physical, the mental and the spiritual. How would it feel to stand atop such a mountain and look down on the whole world? Maybe it's as close as one gets to God.

I spun round and faced Machhapuchhre. The other mountains were arranged in a horseshoe configuration like King Arthur's knights seated at the round table; at the head of the table sat Machhapuchhre the proud monarch—its shark's tooth summit piercing the stratosphere. I knew then why it had never been conquered. It would be disrespectful or, worse, blasphemous. I sat up there for hours just absorbing these sensations until a large bank of clouds came rolling up the valley and quickly veiled the mountains like the curtain at the end of the show. Strangely, I was left with the impression that the mountains had never existed—as though they had merely been an apparition. In lonely satisfaction I began my descent to Pokhara.

The plane trip out of Nepal is an experience in itself. It felt strange sitting in a 747, immersed in technology, after being separated from artificial things so completely. I was slightly cynical about the real world as though mother nature and I had a secret to keep. I was looking down with fascination at the vanilla-fairy-floss cloud layer above which we were soaring when the captain's voice came over the intercom. He told us about our speed, our estimated arrival time and our altitude, which he said was '30 000 feet'. It was then that I noticed a massive mountain range protruding through the blanket of cloud on the horizon. I realised that Mt Everest was the tallest peak there. I was calmed by the sight. The world's highest mountain sat on the horizon, staring me in the eye. I remembered then that Mt Everest climbs to 8848 metres, or 29 028 feet. As high as you are in a jumbo jet, in Nepal you're less than 400 metres off the ground. I closed my eyes and thought of Australia. Things are so different there. Soon I would be back at the beach, holding the sea shells whose ancient cousins protruded from blizzard-lashed mountain summits at the edge of the atmosphere, falling behind as my plane sped into the descending night.

*Gregor Jordan works as a writer/director in the Australian film industry. His short film *Swinger* won the 1995 Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival. Gregor is an amateur adventurer and a keen traveller and trekker. He has just bought some new boots and intends to be off walking again soon.*

# VIEW FROM AN OPEN WINDOW

Putting 'adventure' into 'adventure travel',  
by Glenn Tempest



'Don't forget', the Frenchman had said. 'It is essential you go by bus. It takes two days to Leh from Srinagar. You will be tempted to fly there. Don't. I have been down the Amazon; I have walked across the Kalahari; I once spent five weeks in the Sahara...and they are *nothing* to those two days going up from Srinagar to Leh, up the Kashmir valley into the mountains of Ladakh. Find a patron saint and pray to him; don't look too closely at the side of the road or you'll faint or be sick; pray you don't get the same drunk dishevelled unshaven Kashmiri driver I did who swigged from a bottle of gin and sang and giggled to himself the whole way. You'll be all right. You're British, you have the stiff upper lip, you'll be all right. Take some opium if you can get some. It helps. The greens and purples and browns in the mountains sway and tremble and sing if you do and you giggle with the driver and do not mind that on that corner the bus was an inch from a three thousand foot drop.'

From *Journey in Ladakh*, by Andrew Harvey

**K**eep your heads down', the driver had warned. Like all the other passengers on the bus I dutifully crouched below the window level hoping to avoid getting shot at by whichever of the militant separatists were currently in vogue. It was the middle of the night and we drove quickly and without headlights through the dark, narrow streets. Then, right in the

This group lived to tell the tale and to unload their supplies at Gangotri village, Indian Himalayas. Glenn Tempest

middle of town, the bus suddenly stopped. A hushed discussion took place in the cab. The driver slipped out into the night clutching a large spanner and crawled underneath the engine. The bus had broken down. The quiet minutes ticked slowly by. I imagined a sniper taking careful aim and squeezing the trigger. Two people had been shot dead on this bus route only last week. We sweated in the darkness. Ages later the driver reboarded and the engine coughed into life. A light came on across the street and a dog began to bark. A few minutes later we left the town behind and breathed a collective sigh of relief.

Seasoned travellers to India will tell you that if Delhi belly doesn't get you, the local hill buses surely will. A combination of high speed, poor roads and mountainous terrain conspires to create the world's most perilous bus service. India's complex political situation also plays its part. There are not many places where a passenger can board a bus and be confronted with a sign that says: 'If you find a bomb under your seat please inform the driver'.

Most travellers to the Indian Himalayas begin their bus trip from the vast, concrete wasteland of the Central Bus Depot at

Kashmiri Gate. Here the pulse of New Delhi beats for the many disparate peoples who come and go at all hours of the day and night. Punjabis, Sikhs, Nepalese, Bengalis and Kashmiris—the rich and the poor. Wild-looking *sadhus*—Hindu holy men—strive almost naked past American tourists with their video cameras, baseball caps and Hawaiian aloha shirts. Diesel fumes and dust mix with the sharp aroma of curry, pungent spices and the sweat of countless thousands of people. And of course there are the Delhi wallahs themselves, arms full of luggage, pushing and shoving through the crowds, their children munching on *jalebi*—deep-fried sugar sweets.

Buying a ticket at Kashmiri Gate requires patience, determination and ingenuity. There are no signs, no help counters and the queues make rugby scrums look like Tupperware parties. You won't be the first to battle for an hour through the crowd to window number six, then to be told that tickets to Dharamsala can only be purchased from window twelve. Another hour of elbowing and you find that you should in fact be at window four. And so it goes on. By the time you have emerged from the scrum you are exhausted and clutching a ticket for a bus that has left long ago.

Most of the mountain roads are travelled by the inimitable 'TATA' buses. These noisy, grimy, age-old and seemingly indestructible tin cans on wheels are licensed to seat 35 passengers. Unfortunately the local drivers appear to be unable to count and consequently there are often enough people squashed on board to populate a medium-sized city. On longer trips the driver is accompanied by a partner whose duties include changing the Hindi music tapes, paying roadside tolls and the apparently far less important role of keeping the driver awake.

Not surprisingly, in a country well known for its extremes of poverty and wealth, various levels of comfort are available on buses to the same destination. The local bus stops every few minutes, allows farm animals on board, is criminally cheap and is favoured amongst first-time travellers wishing to immerse themselves in the local colour of the 'genuine' India. (This is of course only a temporary affliction and should they survive this first trip they will have seen enough local colour to last them a lifetime.) Progressively more expensive are the 'de-luxe' and 'super-de-luxe' coaches which are probably just as dangerous although far less crowded and altogether more comfortable. The super-de-luxe coach has air-conditioning (although I have not yet come across one that actually works) and a video/TV running endless Bombay movies (which tend to be a sort of cross between *Grease* and *Lethal Weapon*, where the good guys dress in white satin flares, carry machine-guns and periodically break into song). To enhance the picture, blackout curtains are pulled across the windows and if you so much as peek out at the scenery and let the light in, you can

expect a torrent of verbal abuse. Indians take their movies seriously—even on a bus.

Speeding, erratic driving and overtaking on blind corners are all part of the service. Roadside signs implore drivers to take care: 'Go slowly on all my curves'; 'Let your husband concentrate—don't nag him whilst he is driving'; and 'If you love her—divorce speed'. No one takes any notice of them.

For a number of years I regularly visited Manali, a ramshackle Indian hill town tucked into the lush, green folds of the famous 'Valley of the Gods' and gateway to the mountains and high passes of Lahaul and Zanskar. Manali, still lingering with the memories of British rule and the long-gone days of the old raj, is the honeymoon capital of India. Newly-weds from as far away as Bombay escape the lowland heat to walk amongst the flowering apple orchards and tall cedar forests and, for the first time in their lives, to see snow.

While I was always resigned to the mental and physical discomfort of the 20 long hours it took to reach Manali by bus, one trip in particular stands out as the worst of them all. Our driver, a reed thin, grey-haired Bengali with elusive eyes, drove so fast and so dangerously that everyone on board had little doubt that we were about to meet our respective makers. Fearing the bus as we repeatedly averted head-on collisions by only the slenderest of margins. Speeding through a town we side-swiped a turbaned bicyclist who barely escaped with his life after crashing headlong into a tobacco shop. A policeman blew his whistle, gave chase on his scooter and was soon left far behind. Children scattered in panic and women turned away, veiling their mouths and noses to avoid the choking dust. A cow stepped nonchalantly onto the road, its sacred status forcing our bus to screech to an immediate halt, throwing passengers and luggage over seats. As we drove higher into the hills the road became narrower and even more dangerous but, despite repeated pleading by the passengers, our Bengali continued to drive as though he were angry at the world. We accelerated past a herd of water-buffalo dozing in the midday heat, their herders asleep on hessian bags only inches from the grinding wheels of the bus. A troop of langur monkeys watched indifferently from the roadside. Over the course of the afternoon our bus broke its front axle on two separate occasions and, as an example of Indian ingenuity, was each time welded together using bare leads clipped directly to the overhead electricity wires.

Not far from the village of Kulu we were stopped by a fresh landslide which had blocked the road. Our Bengali licked his lips, leaned over the steering-wheel and narrowed his eyes as though calculating the chances of success should he proceed. Fearing the worst, a number of passengers decided to evacuate the bus but discovered to their horror that our driver had bolted the exit door from the outside, effectively locking everyone in. An argument broke out.

'I am thinking that the driver will try to continue,' whispered an elderly gentleman at my side. 'He is Bengali. What do Bengalis know of our mountain roads? I am telling you this Bengali is a madman and will kill us all!'

Before I had a chance to agree the bus roared into life and we lurched forward into certain disaster. As it picked up speed I panicked, squeezed out of my open window and jumped on to the road. Halfway across the landslip the bus careered sideways off the road and disappeared into a ravine, accompanied by the sound of tearing metal and breaking glass. When the dust had finally settled it lay twisted on its side some ten metres below. Passengers were painfully extricating themselves from the wreckage, crawling out from shattered windows and reciting prayers of thanks. Miraculously no one had been seriously injured and the only fatalities appeared to be a few unfortunate goats that had been grazing at the scene of the crash.

The man who had sat next to me on the bus limped over. Wiping sweat from his brow he pointed in the direction of the running driver who quickly disappeared round a bend in



the road. 'The driver has killed valuable goats belonging to the *pradhan* (the local village headman). Perhaps he has also squashed the poor goatherd. I am thinking that we will not see this Bengali madman again.'

Years ago I learned something of the fatalistic attitude many locals seem to have when travelling through the hills by bus. An especially close encounter with an oncoming taxi—we ran it off the road—left me shaking in my seat. 'Why are you afraid?' asked the unconcerned Delhi wallah sitting

next to me, beaming a red, betel-nut stained smile.

'But', I stammered, 'we almost crashed head on with a taxi. We could have all been killed.'

'Ha, I am telling you', the Delhi wallah shrugged, 'the right of way belongs to the driver of the largest vehicle. Bicycles, rickshaws and scooters are merely the plankton of the sea.' It all suddenly made perfect sense. Buses and trucks rule the road and heaven help any other, lesser vehicle—or pedestrian—getting in the way. Hindus believe that the *Kali Yuga*—the coming of the god Kali—will be an era of destruction and chaos of all that exists. If Indian bus drivers are anything to go by, Kali is already well on his way.



**Left**, happy motoring, Pakistan style. *Lucas Trihey*. **Above**, ...and Indian style. *Tempest*

Occasionally your bus will stop at a roadside *dhaba*, the equivalent of a truck-stop café, where curry, dal, rice and *chai* (sweet tea) seem to be the 'special' of every day. Back on the bus the winding road soon takes its toll as the local passengers—stomachs full of food—one by one succumb to violent travel sickness and throw up out of the nearest window. It never fails to amaze me how after each and every *dhaba* stop the very same passengers repeat this ongoing cycle of eating and throwing up. If you have a window seat (especially towards the rear of the bus), you are best advised to keep your head well inside.

On a recent mountaineering expedition my companions and I were to travel by bus between New Delhi and the tiny village of Gangotri in the Garhwal Himalaya.

Gangotri is only a day's walk from the source of the river Ganges and is regarded by Hindus as one of the holiest pilgrimages in India. The road is always well travelled and, having arranged our very own private bus, I had hopes of an enjoyable, safe journey. After nine previous visits to India I should have known better.

With enormous relief we left the stifling heat of the plains behind for the cooler climate of the hills. Not far beyond the hill town of Utarkashi our bus was stopped by a large, unstable landslide. We could not drive any further. Boulders were still tumbling down the slope as we ran across loose shale to the safety of the other side. A few of our porters carrying heavy loads narrowly missed getting bowled over. After walking for two days along 25 kilometres of landslide-damaged roads we managed to commandeer the only bus available to take us through to Gangotri village. The bus was a particularly sick-looking machine and had it been a horse we would undoubtedly have shot it on the spot. All its tyres were completely bald with substantial chunks of the rubber side walls missing to reveal inner tubes near to bursting. With little choice and a great deal of foreboding I squeezed on board to find a tiny space on the back seat. Seventy people, most of them furiously chain-smoking *biddies*—an especially foul-smelling, primitive-looking, local cigarette—occupied every available nook and cranny. Eventually the driver, a hook-nosed fellow with hard, agate eyes, jumped into the cab. My nightmare had begun.

The roaring torrent of the Ganges River had carved out a breathtakingly deep gorge, negotiated only by a narrow road which has been roughly cut into its sheer-sided left wall. In places the road actually overhung the river which wound its way between house-sized boulders some 500 sickenning metres below. The bus crept slowly over rocks, shingle and mud, repeatedly forcing us to tilt at heart-stopping angles towards the drop. Whole sections of the road had succumbed to gravity, collapsing into the abyss and leaving gaps barely wide enough for our bus to edge past. Nervous laughter changed to gasps of horror as we continued over ever worsening road conditions, the bus's outside rear wheels often turning in empty space. I sweated and squirmed knowing the chances of surviving a plunge into the river would be less than zero. Even the locals had become unusually quiet. Then, on a steep, narrow bend, the bus lost traction in the thick mud and slowly began to slide backwards towards the void. A silent wave of panic took hold of us all as we watched the driver struggle to regain control. Someone shouted: 'Everybody out!' Not needing to be told twice, I and half a dozen others squeezed out of the nearest open windows and jumped on to the road. The

bus miraculously slid to a halt only inches from the drop. In lightly falling rain we somehow managed to push it back up to the top of the mud-covered rise, and reluctantly reboarded. Half an hour later we reached the bottom of the gorge, crossed the Ganges to the other side and breathed a heartfelt sigh of relief. The bus stopped and our still shaking driver leapt from the cab, ran his fingers through his hair, lit yet another *biddie* and loudly proclaimed that the road was far too dangerous and that under no circumstances would he ever drive on it again.

A month later I returned along the same route and despite assurances that the road had been cleared and repaired I could detect little difference. I couldn't resist a smile, however, when we later passed a tourist bus coming in the opposite direction and displaying the words *Paniker Travels* in foot-high letters across its side. At least the passengers had been warned.

Back on the plains the heat once again took my breath away. The main road to New Delhi was chaotic with buses, trucks, buffalo, horses, motor bikes and even the occasional elephant. Bicycles loaded with fruit dodged amongst the traffic. Here the old world collided head-on with the new. A mud-walled hut covered in drying dung displayed a tattered sign advertising Apple computers while 50 metres away a flock of vultures was busy ripping the flesh from a dead water-buffalo.

Arriving in New Delhi in the early hours of the morning my climbing partner, Geoff Butcher, realised that he had inadvertently left his mountaineering boots on the bus. Back at the bus station he asked the night attendant whether anyone had handed them in. It was, I pointed out to Geoff, about as likely as a successful non-stop pogo-stick journey across the Sahara Desert. The attendant looked despondent although he did offer a ray of hope. 'If your boots have been handed in to us they will most surely be in our lost and found room.'

We followed him to a small door which he carefully unlocked. Stepping inside we were greeted by a space so big that it could have been the inspiration behind the final warehouse scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Unfortunately, it was empty save for the squeaks of scurrying rats and the flutter of pigeons.

'Very few items are we seeing here', the attendant's voice echoed sadly, his head wobbling from side to side.

'You do realise', Geoff said to me as we walked back to the hotel, 'that tomorrow, somewhere in New Delhi, an Indian bus driver will be walking the streets in 40°C heat, wearing a pair of size 12, high-altitude, plastic mountaineering boots that are at least six sizes too big for him. It'll be sheer, bloody agony.'

'We can only hope so', I said smiling. ☺

Glen Tempest is a renowned raconteur, rockclimber, cross-country skier, mountaineer and mountain photographer who has been a regular contributor to *Wild* for many years. He recently released his first book, *Rockclimbing—Getting Started*.

# OF Islands & Albatrosses

Kayaking across Bass Strait, by John Wilde



w i l d c a n o e i n g





## Victoria

Venus Bay

Warrnambool  
Cape LiptrapPort Welshpool  
Sunday Island  
Snake Island

Wilson's Promontory

Mt Oberon  
Refuge Cove

Bass

Strait

Oberon Bay

Kent Group

Murray Passage

Hogan Island

Erith Island

**E**aster Friday dawns in Port Welshpool and temps are short. The members of a group celebrating Easter finally quieten their drunken revelry at 6 am, just as our alarms begin to ring—supposedly to wake us up. There is little reluctance to leave despite the challenge before us. Soon we are on the sea, free to make our own decisions and take fate into our own hands for up to two weeks. We are totally self-sufficient—food, clothing, shelter, charts, maps and compasses. These are now the essentials of life as we paddle out to Refuge Cove near the end of Wilsons Promontory to spend our first night. Yachts and tired bushwalkers surround us here and, again, we are glad to leave it all behind us at dawn as we take a south-east course amongst the albatrosses into Bass Strait.

It is at this point that we realise the full commitment required for what we intend to do. Though the dawn is spectacular the sea is obscured by a thick fog. As we leave the rock pillars which guard Refuge Cove we are swallowed in a sinister blanket that dims most senses but seems to heighten our hearing. As though stumbling on to a stage set from a Viking film, we move from the pinks and mauves of the dawn to an all-encompassing obscurity. We huddle together in a group, yet each wrapped in our own reflections; the sense of isolation is extreme; the thoughts of security left behind and reasons for placing ourselves at risk are very much at the forefront of our minds.

The paddling rhythm takes over and we forget our doubts as we become accustomed to this strange existence but we are brought back to reality by the sound of a foghorn nearby and we begin to crane our necks for the first sight of a rearing bow about to descend on us and shatter our

solitude and our frail craft. The morning wears on and all becomes quiet again—a good sign—though we are kept alert by our GPS unit which indicates that the tide has swept us more than 15° from our original bearing, much further than we had originally estimated.

Suddenly we are in bright sunshine, dazzled by the light and reflection from the unbroken swell. As we peer anxiously for a sighting of tonight's destination the first curious albatross arrives on huge wings which support a streamlined body; eyes alert, expression intelligent as it floats over our heads without noticeable signs of movement. Soon it is joined by inquisitive partners riding the ocean thermals with obvious ease and grace. By lifting a paddle we would almost be able to touch one of these majestic creatures, but we do not want to break the spell and we are anxious not to cause harm. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is brought to mind and we have no wish to anger the gods.

Finally we see our destination, a small hump on the horizon which seems to take for ever to develop features and character. But this is the magic of the sea. Our backs are cramped and our bodies are beginning to feel the strain, but the rhythm of the strokes continues and produces a sense of well-being and enjoyment. Tonight we can say that we are in Bass Strait. The journey has really begun.

That night on Hogan Island, some 55 kilometres from Wilsons Promontory, convinces us that this is how life should be: a tiny patch of sand on which to land, an empty hut in the far distance and a flat space amongst the penguin burrows for camping. A few days here would not go amiss—on a speck in the sea devoid of all but basic comforts, with the sky and the sea—and penguins for company.

But harmony is short-lived. We are not Robinson Crusoes of a century ago and we do not have weeks and months to spare.

We catch the tide before dawn and hope for a fair crossing to the Kent Group. The outside world intrudes on us again as we are intercepted by a large yacht, its crew anxious to rescue us from our foolish plight. In our three fragile, fibreglass and plastic shells, bobbing in the ocean swell 25 kilometres from land, we refuse all help and politely request a weather forecast. Our would-be rescuers leave us in disgust with warnings of strong wind and storm.

Weary and glad at last to round the incredible, sculptured cliffs of Dover Island and cross the sound to Deal Island, we greet the island's population of Bennet's wallabies with delight and enjoy a late lunch in a heavy rainstorm.

A visit to the old lighthouse-keeper's cottage and a chat with the island's caretaker enlightens us that we are trespassing on a nature reserve and are not welcome to stay. Further information leads us to embark for a small hut on Erith Island, a mere 30-minutes' paddle across Murray Passage. With a 30-knot wind against a roaring tide, we reluctantly don our dripping wet paddling gear and with paddles firmly gripped we begin the immense ferry glide to secure comfort and lodging for the night.

Erith Island is certainly a jewel in the centre of Bass Strait. One of the three large islands comprising the Kent Group, it gives shelter to all—many a storm-tossed sailor and sea bird must have given thanks for this

North Point

Rocky Cape

Brend

Demerdji

Tasmania

Nelson Bay

Anderson Bay

tranquil haven. The little hut overlooking the beach is perfect; built of driftwood, it suits the setting. We read through the logbook—of dramas and pleasure; epics and history. Of early wrecks; of desperate sailors in a seal-skin coracle being driven back by hungry sharks. Sun and laughter of summer; wind and dark of winter.

Unfortunately, the logbook contains little warning of other shipwrecked life. As dark descends, so does the abundant population of 'ratus ratie'. We defend ourselves as best we can and get little sleep.

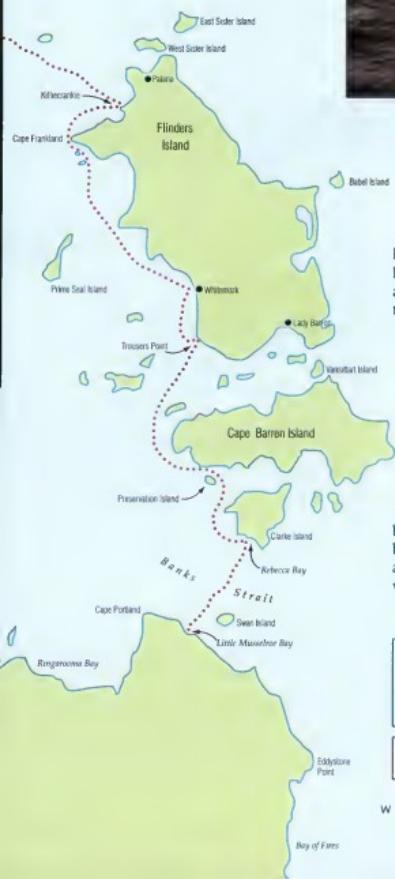
At dawn we see an angry sea alive with fleck and foam. The 30-knot westerly includes much stronger gusts and at least for today we are marooned in this land of delight. We explore some of its nooks and crannies, cliffs and scrub. We are pleased and excited at our finds. The day passes slowly till we dare the strength of Murray Passage again to visit Deal and our reluctant host, who now greets us as friends and shows us the island's museum as well as granting us a phone call for weather information.

Our options are limited, the weather 'window' is short. The sea is at three metres, winds moderating west-north-west to 20

knots before a late south-west change at more than 35 knots. We take a punt and set our alarms for an early start.

At 4.15 am I hear a voice in the distance. In a dream I reply and shake myself to awareness. The fly-sheet flaps in the wind and Evan swears in relief. I replay the sequence of rats and noise, of leaving the hut and setting a bivvy on the beach, of

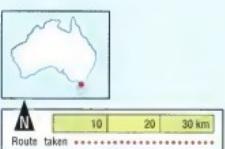
We assure Gary that rat bites do not always cause death. We sing and surf in the glory of sunlight. Finally, nine hours later, we relieve our cramped limbs on the beach at Killiecrankie, northern Flinders Island. We have few qualms about demolishing hot pies from the shop and settle into a secluded and very comfy little camp-site behind the dunes, surrounded by the



another night of little sleep. Gary shows us his rat bite in the gloom.

By 5 am large quantities of very cold water are squirting into the neck of my paddling cag and I brace regularly into large areas of white water in the blackness of night as we fight wind and tide again to make the most of the day. Dark thoughts assail me as we leave shelter and feel the full force of the westerly. Should I have enclosed at least a sketch map of New Zealand? Will the insurance company pay my family if I should perish on such a foolish venture? Would they consider this suicide?

At dawn the wind moderates noticeably and is now more to our backs. Despite a large and still breaking sea I quickly rig sail. An albatross crosses my bow on silent wings. My companions are euphoric.



Under sail, heading for Deal Island. Gary Edmond. **Pages 58 and 59**, battling a large swell on the run in to Killiecrankie. John Wilde. **Page 59**, budding sea kayakers on Deal Island? Edmond

granite cliffs which form a climber's paradise.

The storm blows in during the night, boats drag their anchors, but our kayaks are safe at the top of the beach and we enjoy a lie-in and a rest-day to explore the beaches and cliffs. The locals are friendly though commercial fishermen shake their heads at our frail craft. Even so, they are happy to share their knowledge of the area with us and we receive a faxed weather-map and are invited in for tea and damper.

A haul round Cape Frankland the following day puts us on the west coast of Flinders Island and with a following wind and a calm sea we speed down to Whitemark to buy fresh food and stock up on supplies. We leave early the next day to escape this enclave of 'civilisation'—probably the low point of the trip—despite more strong winds. At Trousers Point we decide to call it a day. We are hammering into steep, breaking swells and more than 20 knots of wind. The cove and beaches of Trousers Point provide plenty of temptations to stay and we while away our time searching for paper nautilus shells.

Just for a change we make a dawn start to catch the best of tides and a bouncy

## bass strait—some facts

Bass Strait has long been the playground of adventurous spirits. George Bass and Matthew Flinders are credited with the discovery of the strait: Bass exploring much of the coast in a whaleboat and circumnavigating Tasmania in the small sloop *Norfolk* in 1799 before disappearing in the Pacific in 1803; Flinders going on to circumnavigate Australia in 1802–03. No doubt there were many Aboriginal stories and myths of the area beforehand.

On his voyage to the strait Flinders noted the huge number of birds—one flock he is reputed to have estimated as containing 133 million petrels—as well as a profusion of geese and seals. No doubt this report helped to fuel the sealing and whaling industry that developed shortly afterwards and began to strip the area of its natural inhabitants.

The strait lies in the centre of the roaring forties, and is renowned for its rocky islands, outcrops, shipwrecks and unpredictable tidal currents. Some claim that the strait is responsible for over 100 shipwrecks and even with modern charts and navigation aids ships still disappear. In 1990 the yacht *Great Expectations*, with a crew of six, left Devonport and was never seen or heard from again though bits of wreckage were recovered after a substantial search.

The shipwreck regarded as the strait's worst took place in 1845 when the immigrant ship *Catarauqi* ran aground on King Island with over 400 people on board. Only nine survived and the beach was covered in wreckage—and with bodies, which were buried in a mass grave.

One of the most famous stories concerns the naming of Preservation Island. The supply ship *Sydney Cove*, en route to Australia's earliest colony, was deliberately run aground there after severe storm damage, yet all crew were safe. Her cargo, mainly rum, was unloaded and put under guard on a tiny, adjacent island now called Rum Island. The ship's longboat was dispatched to row to Sydney and organise a rescue, but it foundered somewhere on the Victorian coast. Thus began a horror walk to Sydney which several sailors survived to raise the alarm.

A decked longboat, *Eliya*, and a schooner, *Francis*, were despatched at this point, arriving at the island some months later. Both boats were loaded and left Preservation

crossing has us opposite Cape Barren Island. A long haul to Preservation Island, the site of an early shipwreck and tale of woe before Bass Strait was even discovered and the standard route to Sydney involved sailing south of Tasmania. Finally, another long pull in to Rebecca Bay, Clarke Island, though *en route* we are entertained by the antics of a pod of dolphins who weave, bob and jump around our boats to our great delight.

The huge boulders covered with red lichen matching a clear sea and golden sand make this a very special place. We light a

small driftwood fire on the beach and reminisce about the trip. A good forecast will take us across Banks Strait on the next tide and we all feel a sense of loss at leaving this unique area. Our minds rebel at the thoughts of signs and directions, roads and cities.

We recall the albatrosses on stormy seas, dolphins playing amongst the kayaks, penguins waddling past our bivies; the comradeship of a committing experience and the isolation of the sea. A journey of this nature is far more important than the goal, the final achievement of reaching mainland Tasmania heralds the end of a great adventure and is gained with reluctance rather than joy. As always, our thoughts turn to the next trip, the plans for

with the rest of the crew, but the *Eliya* was never seen again.

Subsequently many lighthouses were constructed in the strait to reduce danger to shipping. One of the most remote is on Deal Island at an altitude of about 300 metres. Unfortunately, the lighthouse was so frequently in the cloud that it was of little use and it has now been replaced by two automatic lights at lower levels. The lighthouse has not been staffed since 1993. At the moment the island is regarded as a nature reserve though not officially. There is a caretaker at present, and one option would be a hand-over to the National Parks & Wildlife Service.

Who completed the first kayak crossing of Bass Strait also raises some conjecture. Two stories make the rounds amongst paddlers. One is of two Victorians who paddled the strait to Tasmania but on arriving encountered huge surf and, deliberately abandoning their boats beyond the surf line, swam into the beach; the other is of a solo paddler from Tasmania who died in an attempted surf landing near Port Welshpool. There may be truth in both stories, but neither is dated as far as I am aware.

In 1980 when the first sea instructor kayak course was run on the mainland of Australia, the colourful and controversial character Laune Ford was invited to preside over the action. He arrived in style having paddled solo across the strait. At the end of the course several of the trainees paddled back across the strait with him.

In 1986 Earle Bloomfield used a crossing of the strait as part of the training for an expedition to Greenland to retrace the paddle strokes of explorer Gino Watkins and several years later tiger walker and hard man Peter Treseider completed a return crossing in three days, luck being with him to produce very calm conditions.

There have been several close calls on kayak crossings including that of two adven-

turous kayakers who left Little Musselroe Bay with high hopes. Unfortunately, their boats leaked and their pumps were inadequate. One of them was carrying an emergency positioning indicator and response beacon and its signal was picked up by a commercial airline. They were rescued by the Flinders Island lifeboat many hours later suffering hallucinations and hypothermia—hardly surprising as they had been up to their chests in water for more than eight hours.

Any person intending to cross the strait must assume the need to be totally self-sufficient for some time, and have the fitness and expertise to cope with long hours in a rough sea. Considerable sea-kayak experience is recommended, and equipment must be completely dependable.



Dwarfed by the cliffs of Dover Island in the Kent Group. Wilde

future epics. King Island, Torres Strait, New Zealand, the list of things to do never seems to get shorter, only more extensive. We shall be back again!

John Wilde has been a full-time adventurer and outdoors instructor for longer than he likes to remember. His present interests include white-water boating, sea kayaking and cross-country skiing, which he has been so fortunate as to pursue throughout the world.

# A BIT OF A WALK

**Harry Hill describes a 'lost' Snowy Mountains bushwalk along what is now the drowned course of the upper Tumut River**

Doug Grace and I became great mates when we were trainee teachers at Sydney Teachers' College in 1944–45. As teachers we went our separate ways but still kept in touch, and when I suggested to Doug that he should come down to Tumut and 'go for a bit of a walk with me', I was certain he'd accept.

Consequently, on 19 January 1950 we left Tumut in my little Morris 8/40 tourer to drive to Talbingo where our walk was to start.

Tumut born and bred, I'd used the stretch of the Tumut River near town for swimming, fishing, camping, water-melon raiding and general mucking around. For years I'd been keen to see the river south of Talbingo having heard it described as 'wild', 'rough', 'hard going', 'a challenge', 'inaccessible', even 'down-right impossible'.

We were young, fit, keen, and adventurous and were certain that we'd done all the necessary planning and preparation. I'd been able to borrow a map; a Snow Lease one that showed the country from near Talbingo to Mt Kosciusko. The Tumut River was there, showing every major loop, bend and contortion—although we were soon to discover that 90 per cent of the bends weren't shown. A piece of string stretched from Mt Jagungal, the source of the river, to Talbingo led us to believe that we had about 70 miles to walk—another horrible underestimation. [Throughout this article Imperial measures have been used: 1 mile = 1.6 kilometres; 1 yard = 90 centimetres; 1 foot = 30 centimetres; 1 inch = 2.5 centimetres.] There were no contour lines just occasional spot heights—in feet—but sufficient indication that the country we were to cover was anything but flat. Minor streams and some other features were there, and named. Each was to be read a hundred times in the next couple of days and we will remember Landers, Lick Hole, Glendower, Razorback and Pinbeyan if we live to be ninety.

On both sides of the river the map was heavily covered with drawings of hairy caterpillars. Each was meant to show elevated land and we were to find that one

caterpillar didn't represent one range but several ranges, ridges, gullies, chasms, cliff-faces, peaks, saddles, sloping surfaces, steep surfaces and near perpendicular surfaces.

Our preplanning had gone something like this. It's 70 miles one way, with ordinary walking we can do four miles in an hour. So let's say we allow for a bit of rough stuff and only do three miles in an hour. If we walk for ten hours a day we cover 30 miles. The days are long so we

camera. He was into processing his own film.

The drive to Talbingo was pleasant. We went into the Talbingo Pub with the intention of asking the publican whether we could leave my car behind the pub. It was thought to be diplomatic to buy a drink before making the request. My order of a shandy for myself and a lemonade for Doug was enough to cause the couple of locals seated at the bar to put down their beer and look at us closely. My request was granted. We could even put the car in an open shed.

One of the locals was prompted to engage in conversation. 'Did ya say ya was goin' up the river?'



The Talbingo Pub, on the Tumut River, was the starting point for the author's walk. Right, testing the river for depth. All photos Doug Grace collection

might press on for an extra hour or two. This means that we can cover the 70 miles in a bit over two days—two and a half perhaps. Let's allow the extra half day for special circumstances. That means we can get in and back out in six days.' Or so we reckoned.

We equipped ourselves for six days. Six days' food, much of it tinned; the clothes we wore; a jumper; a spare shirt; shorts and socks; an ex-army groundsheet; a blanket; a cotton tent without a floor; a billy; a plate, mug and spoon each. We both took a water-bottle thinking that more than likely it was surplus gear but perhaps handy if we had to get away from the river. Everything was stuffed into our haversacks—a heavy canvas bag with two front pockets and stiff, leather shoulder straps. Doug carried our most important piece of equipment—his



'Yes, we're going for a bit of a walk.'

'Ya goin' fishin', ain't ya?'

'No, just walking.'

'Just bloody walkin', not bloody fishin', ya goin' up that bloody river and not bloody fishin', ya must be bloody mad.'

The publican and the others agreed with him and Doug and I had our first feeling of doubt.

As we left, the publican warned: 'Be careful crossing the suspension bridge over

the Jounama Creek. A silly bloody Irishman working on "the Scheme" had a few too many the other night, fell off the bridge and drowned. They pulled him out of the big hole below the pub.' These tidings caused our second feeling of doubt.

The first day's walk was easy and pleasant except for heavy haversacks, shoulder-straps that almost cut through the skin, the heat and the flies. We soon found that if we didn't try to brush the flies from our faces most settled on our backs and haversacks to hitch a ride. I'm sure that 500 small, black flies weigh quite a bit. Most of the time we were in open country away from the river and heading towards the base of Big Talbingo Mountain.

Camp was set up on the river bank with the mountain looming behind us. A swim was considered to be the best way to cool off and we found it did more than cool—the water was invigorating. We also found that we had made a slight error in selecting the camp-site even though it was just a few yards from the water. Those few yards were well supplied with blackberries and stinging nettles—plant life not compatible with naked bodies.

We'd told the Talbingo Pub clientele we were not going fishing. That was not completely true. I had a hand line in my haversack pocket and as we walked in I'd caught several grasshoppers and had poked them into one of my spare socks. After our swim I baited the line and threw it into the most likely stretch of water. As we ate tea we could hear fish splashing and we felt confident that we'd have trout for breakfast.

Some more map study led us to set the next day's destination as Lobbs Hole, the junction of the Yarrangobilly and Tumut Rivers. That was an estimated distance of 20 miles; a distance we thought reasonable.

A groundsheet directly on bare ground does not make for the most comfortable sleeping situation and we were both pleased to see the dawn on the second day.

We didn't have trout for breakfast. I've heard fishermen describe a trout rising as enough to make the water boil. The Tumut River was not exactly boiling that morning but there were sufficient fish jumping and splashing to make it lukewarm at least. The grasshopper was still on the hook.

From Talbingo to the base of Big Talbingo Mountain there was some semblance of a river flat at least on one side of the river but we soon found that it did not continue. The slope of the valley side reached right to the water's edge in places and any part of the river bank and valley bottom not covered by water was a tangled jumble of river stones, big boulders, thick scrub, flood debris and standing, flood-battered trees.

Our anticipated rate of progress of three miles an hour had to be adjusted. The map showed several notations of 'cliff face' but they were well back from the river and they helped to determine our position and progress. But by the time we reached Landers Creek we were ready to abuse the makers of our map—cliff faces made up the actual bank of the river every few hundred yards.

Most of the river was one continuous run of rapid; a bottom of large river stones, mid-stream boulders, rock shelves, mini-falls, caught tree-trunks. Most of it was white water from bank to bank. We were convinced that we'd have to cross the river at some time but had not seen a spot where the water was less than three feet deep and over 30 yards wide.

Where the river hit a cliff face it was usually on the outside bank of a sharp bend and there the force of the water had kept the stream clear of debris but the water was deep—very deep. On the other hand, the opposite bank was usually an inviting bed of sand and gravel—easy progress for a short stretch.

We had two options: Climb up, over and down the precipice—or swim the river. We tried option one but when the third or fourth precipice took us 30 minutes to negotiate only to find that the next precipice looked like a 40-minute one, we moved to option two, the swim.

In several places it was possible to wade the river—but it was dangerous. We chose to do our wading barefoot. Neither of us had spare footwear and we thought it unwise to get our boots wet on purpose. Bare feet, slippery and moving rocks, stones rather than sand or gravel, crotch-deep water, a very strong current and an idiot mate hoping to get the ultimate action photo made each crossing a low-breath, high-pulse-rate, descriptive profanity event.

We kept count of the river-crossings until we stopped for lunch. Counting from then on was considered a waste of energy. It seemed reasonable to adjust our expected rate of progress to one mile an hour.

The map was being checked every 15 minutes. We were sure we'd missed Lick Hole Creek. Eventually, we did reach a creek and although our bodies told us that we'd had enough for the day our will-power overruled such a decision and we pressed on to Glendower Creek. The distance from Lick Hole Creek to Glendower Creek is about one mile but that took us many hours.

At our first camp I treated a blister on my foot. Doug was blisterless and attributed that to his new ex-US-Army boots. At the camp on Glendower Creek we checked our feet again. I still had one blister but Doug's boots had let him down—he had nine, most on the outside of one foot!

Just beyond Glendower Creek the map showed a feature marked as Razorback Ridge, which projected into a big loop in the river. We judged that it would be well over a mile to follow the river round the loop but less than half that if we opted for the short cut over the ridge. We could look up the side of the ridge; it was steep, but we could not see any cliff faces or impossible sections and we hoped that the down-hill slope would be similar.

Before we bedded down we had decided on the short cut and had also agreed

that the full course of the river was beyond us and that we should get to Lobbs Hole and make an escape to the highway by way of a track along the Yarrangobilly River and Middle Creek.

The climb over Razorback Ridge was torture. It was heavily timbered with stringybark and apple box and a great deal of shrubbery, which proved to be handy as we found we needed to grab something in front of us to pull ourselves up. The ground surface was primarily loose shale that moved underfoot so that often a step forward produced a negative result. It took almost 40 minutes to reach the crest of the ridge and the descent was no faster.

We needed a break at the river and we found that the run of blisters along Doug's foot had joined to form one long, blood-blistered track.

Almost unbelievably, from then on the country became much more acceptable; patches of lightly timbered river flat up to a quarter of a mile long, still pools in the river, places where the river could be crossed easily, sand and gravel beaches and even some grassy patches.



The river still had to be crossed at times and at one point on the western bank we were amazed by what we found. River stones had been placed in great stacks. Each stack of stones was about six feet high and generally had straight, vertical sides. A stack might be as big as a shed but most were the size of a house. In places there was a corridor between stacks and I was able to wander along one corridor then turn into another. I was later told that the stacks were the work of Chinese gold miners who, after leaving the Kiandra gold-field, prospected

the full length of the Tumut River and decided that it was worth removing all the river stones in and adjacent to the river to get down to bedrock and to the gold that had accumulated there.

Eventually we reached the point where the Yarrangobilly River flowed into the Tumut and were overjoyed to see footprints in the sand. As we moved up the Yarrangobilly we found more evidence of early Snowy Mountains Scheme activity—graded bits of track, tyre marks, culverts and a shed.

One culvert had a rough, painted sign: 'Kilduff's Crossing'. It had something else as well. Our feet were dragging somewhat and we paid little attention to where they were landing. When my foot was a couple of inches from the ground I sensed that something was about to happen. It did! First that foot, then the other, then both in quick succession danced and jumped to get away from a six-foot brown snake that was



**Left,** picking up free-loading flies. **Above,** dinner time.

gyrating, coiling around my legs and looping up to my midriff. I was pleased to see the snake disappear up the culvert at Kilduff's Crossing. Both Doug and I were even more pleased when a dropped-pants examination of my lower half failed to find fang marks or little drops of blood.

The track up Middle Creek was clear walking but uphill all the way. It crossed the creek more than 20 times. By mid-afternoon we thought that we might get out to the highway before evening but fatigue, weariness and actual pain were setting in. We pulled up for a ten-minute spell.

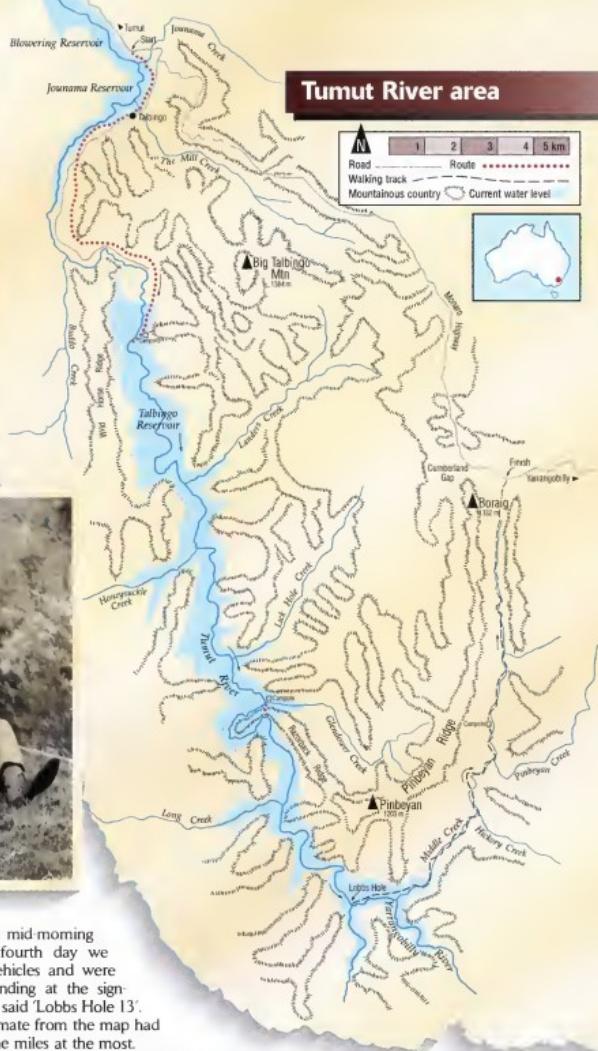
I woke an hour later and then only because some bull ants had found me, explored me and had decided that I was juicy enough to become a meal. My yellows woke Doug and this time it was more than pants that came off—I stripped completely.

Sanity prevailed and rather than push our bodies further we decided to camp where we were.

About mid-morning on the fourth day we heard vehicles and were soon standing at the sign-post that said 'Lobbs Hole 13'. Our estimate from the map had been nine miles at the most.

I stopped the first car that came along and asked for a lift to the foot of the mountain to collect my car. The driver was a bank manager from Tumut and an avid trout fisherman. We engaged in light conversation for a while, mainly about what I'd been doing for the past few days. When I told him how the river boiled with rising fish each evening and morning he asked how many we'd caught. When I said we hadn't worried about fishing, that we were just having a bit of a walk, he looked at me carefully and said, 'you must be mad'. Perhaps we were, everyone seemed to be telling us so.

In 1950 the Snowy Mountains Scheme was moving in to dam the Tumut River. By the end of our walk Doug and I were ready to say: 'Damn it!' Yet when I now stand on the wall of Talbingo Dam and look up-



## Tumut River area

stream at miles of backed up water or when I walk to the top of the cliff face near Lick Hole Creek and look down on what's left of Razorback Ridge although I marvel at what's there I wish I could still see the river running free.

Today, I thank Doug for having dragged his camera along. The photos now depict a lost landscape and add a bit more to the memory of our 'bit of a walk'.

**Harry Hill**, a retired school principal, has had a lifelong interest in the Australian bush. He has walked, camped, explored, photographed and fished much of the High Country between his home, Tumut, and Mt Kosciusko. The author of a number of books—including a guide to the Hume and Hovell Walking Track—he is also an active member of the Kosciusko Huts Association, which is concerned with the restoration and conservation of huts in Kosciusko National Park.

A journey of discovery in  
the Victorian Alps,  
by Stephen Curtain

***H***ad I come for a touch of soul-searching or to look for a bit of wilderness? Or maybe both? As I sprawled in a heap at the end of the day these thoughts seemed far away. The sun dipped below the horizon leaving us in the shadows of late evening. We longed for the cool of night but even at dusk the air felt nauseatingly warm and thick with humidity. Mosquitoes buzzed about incessantly, prying for a dose of blood. Although we were all anxious to collapse into our tents and forget

The Wonnangatta River below Snowy Bluff at sunrise. Main photo, the other end of the day, on West Peak, Mt Bogong. Peter Chew



# FAR-OFF



the day's hardships, we were first in need of some serious rehydration. Only two or three litres of water remained among the five of us for dinner that night and for the next day's long haul along the ridges. I had pushed my body hard that day and as we sluggishly got to our feet and dropped below the saddle in a fruitless search for water I found the going even harder. Numbed by our unrewarded effort, Jenny, John and I stumbled back to camp an hour or so later in darkness to rejoin the others. I returned to my tent and lay down, feverish with perspiration. A trickle of warm blood seeped from my nose—a further sign of dehydration. I wanted to be elsewhere.

As a tiny tot—not too long ago—my fingers would pore over a street directory as though reading Braille, searching for some lost end of the

world I knew as Melbourne suburbia. The intricacies of route finding in a maze of back streets and local creek reserves had a certain appeal and a new, exploratory adventure would never be too far away. The mysteries of the Australian Alps later replaced suburbia as the venue for such adventures. Leg cramps and the burden of an overweight rucksack had marked my earliest forays into the Bogongs in Victoria; the reward, however, had been my first taste of one of bushwalking's simple satisfactions: the view into an abyss of deep valleys and dark, crumpled ranges. Such rewards have beckoned ever since.

In recent times my desire to discover hidden places in the Victorian Alps in particular was fulfilled. I began once again by allowing my fingers to break trail while I

perused a map spread out on my kitchen table among several weeks' accumulation of planning notes. A route for a major, multiweek walk—most of it off track—slowly emerged. With hindsight, it was all too easy for my fingers to sweep across dozens of knolls and spurs; an unsavoury experience would eventuate for every mountainous treasure they picked out.

This waterless and mosquito-ridden saddle above the Wonnangatta River was one of them. We were all mentally and physically exhausted. The bone-dry camp-site was cold comfort after contending with the day's fanning hot, northerly wind and scrubby, steep, off-track navigation.

Early on, climbing up to the Great Divide where it crosses Mt McDonald's summit several days' walk from our starting-point at Sheepyard Flat, things had been different. We

# PLACES

had been full of fuel, lucid and alert. It had also been considerably cooler. The view to the north was of the bulk of Eagles Peaks—more a lovely collection of outcrops than a single peak. However, the sight of Mt Buller shimmering in the background served to remind us of what had once been an untouched alpine summit. I remembered seeing an old photograph which recorded Buller's pre-downhill-skiing days and being

Accompanying us along the highest ridges was the lonely Alpine Walking Track (now renamed the Australian Alps Walking Track).

Mt Clear loomed ahead. An ironic name: a large area of forest below its summit had recently been gutted for its goods—we could hear the work of loggers down in the valley of the Jamieson River. It ceased in the early evening as we settled into camp though at first light the sputter and roar of

snow-gum forest made us distinctly paranoid. It was a bizarre feeling; the absence of the reassuring calls of birds was so startling as to be almost deafening. Further down in the valley our unease waned as we sat in a small clearing eating lunch with March flies buzzing lazily about us and providing us with a distraction, albeit not a welcome one.

I felt small—but not lost—in the vastness of the surrounding ranges. Surveying the



transported back to the very day the photo was taken: then, only several small snow-drifts lingered on its lofty, grassy top.

Elsewhere, a jumble of high, alpine peaks, isolated plains and plunging spurs beckoned. As pointed fingers drew lines of promising passage through the ranges we stood mesmerised by the magnificence of our surroundings.

A sudden realisation snapped me out of my trance. Perhaps a little overwhelmed with the enormity of our intention, I couldn't help but think: 'That's a bloody lot of miles to walk!' Nicki's reassurance was also strangely unsettling: 'You know, starting this walk is a bit like the body ripping itself apart but then rebuilding itself bit by bit,' she chuckled. Alan, Keryn and Jenny groaned quietly. I smiled apprehensively.

We were entering the area known as the Wonnangatta-Moroka, where dry, rocky slabs—obliquely tilted and layered—guard the crest of the Great Dividing Range.

chain saw and bulldozer resumed, droning out across the ranges.

It was with feelings of trepidation and excitement that we deviated from the track for the first time, descending deep into the heart of the Macalister River's headwaters. Somewhere downstream, still days away, a small but impressive mount known as the Crinoline hid amongst the Macalister's tributaries—there we would swing eastward.

Every so often, in small, open snow plains, we encountered trotter marks scattered about the place, centred on large, muddied pools of water. This began to make me a little edgy.

'Whaddya reckon?'

'Whaddya mean?' came the wary reply.

'You know', pause, 'that there are feral pigs up here, don't you?'

Silence. The thought of large, disturbed lumps of wild pork crashing through the scrub toward us was laughable. However, as we walked on, the eerie silence of the

view across the valley to a ridge known as the Butcher Country—on to which we would soon travel—the name seemed apt; apparently a water-scarce ridge for many kilometres, I felt sure that the Butcher Country would do its best to 'quarter and hind' us. In the welcome shade of the snow gums, our minds were prone to drift. I had fostered a love-hate relationship with days like this one—typical of high summer in the Alps—over several years. Serene and timeless, the ranges close at hand seared in a sea of blue-green eucalyptus haze. Attempting to walk off track on such a hot day—in questionable scrub—was difficult and demanding, testing our patience and diligence.

Our progress was slow as we continued down a seemingly endless spur. We increasingly dreaded the intense heat which radiated from buried, rounded domes of rock as they passed underfoot. Sweat oozed from every pore.

In the last hour of light, relief finally came as we reached the Macalister. Its lukewarm water soothed our weary bodies—a shallow pebble race trapped the last of the day's heat and we sprawled in the gurgling water, recovering from our exertions. It was New Year's Eve. At that very moment countless thousands were drinking themselves into a jolly state. A time warp away from it all, we celebrated in a fashion befitting our remote-

furnace-like heat that would quickly build up within our tents. Beyond the valley's steep and impressive walls the sun shone in a cloudless, blue sky—we longed for rain to cool things down.

A brief chat with a friendly fellow camped on the river flats provided an explanation for our hypothesised 'flying pork'—the muddied pools and trotter marks were not made by oversized, crazed pigs but by sambar deer which could weigh 200 kilograms; a meeting with one of these beasts was hardly more inviting than an eye-to-eye encounter with an infuriated, burrowless wombat.

'Aawwk!...aahhh'. It was a day later and the unnerving shriek of a human voice suddenly cut the silence of the snow-gum woodland. Alan and I turned to one another in horror. Our companions were somewhere ahead of us. A dozen daunting scenarios flashed through our minds. Our pulses raced as we bolted like madmen through the scrub toward the others, expecting the worst. Had it been a snake bite? Would we find Jenny doubled over; or an impaled Keryn? We found the girls casually strolling along, unaware of the commotion. 'What? What's wrong? Who's hurt?' Alan spluttered. They looked at us quizzically. Suddenly: 'Aaaaark, aark! With

blew fiercely, increasing in strength as we reached the summit and took in the fine view: a mighty storm was brewing.

Indeed, our arrival at Lake Tali Karng the following day coincided with vicious squalls. The heavy dollops of rain which pummelled the forest about us provided cherished relief for the weary walkers. For once there was no urgency to pitch our tents by the lake's shore. On other such stormy occasions I would have thrown the tent up and hidden deep in my sleeping bag; this time I just peered out of the door, 'kicked back' and took it all in. Swirling eddies of light mist on the mirror-like surface of the lake contrasted with the ferocity of the wind which lashed the spurs high above us. At last the heat had gone!

I awoke the following morning not to the pitter-patter of rain, but to that of Jenny's feet on the grass outside. An almighty wallop followed as she dived into the icy lake, water exploding around her body—a true water-baby even in a temperature only a few degrees above zero. My own dive into the lake's mysterious waters came later in the morning—a bracing swim revitalised body and soul. (The invigorating waters also encouraged a fine soprano.)

Satisfaction is a beautiful thing. Three days later we were proud to have rambled



Alpine camp at Stirling Gap, Mt Bogong. **Chew.** Right, glorious ridge walking near Mt McDonald. **Glenn van der Knijff**

ness: decrepit party hats left over from Christmas; candles for fire-works; and the timeless bushwalking classic Tim Tams for party food.

Although we had no hangover the next day a lethargy born of the heat and our exhaustion remained with us as we stood in the morning sunlight which pierced the tree-tops. Without fuss or argument we boycotted our planned climb up and over the Butcher Country as the cool of morning quickly disappeared and a surge of heat slowly mounted. We had settled—though not by choice—into a daily routine of waking early to make good time for the forthcoming day but also to escape the



a flutter of wings and another blood-curdling shriek a gang-gang cockatoo took to the higher treetops. The eerie silence returned to the woodland. Alan and I walked on, much chastened.

As we rested for a moment on a small flat beneath the Crinoline's summit the parched surrounds reminded us more of the thirsty clay-pans of central Australia than of the cool, grassy glades we had been used to finding at these mountainous heights; the summit stood boldly against the sky as an unusual, but beautiful, crenated dome. A hot, northerly wind still

to the most southerly point of our route. The subalpine Wellington Plateau supports the granite summits of the Sentinels while its northern flanks, from where we had come, make up the bowl-shaped valley that cradles Tali Karng and the infant Wellington River. Tali Karng's gemstone-blue surface beckoned to us yet again as it peered out between distant treetops—a simple dive, it seemed, would land us somewhere in that tiny swimming pool far below.

We cast our eyes eastward over the Avon River, another untouched jewel. As strong as our desire was to roam amongst the

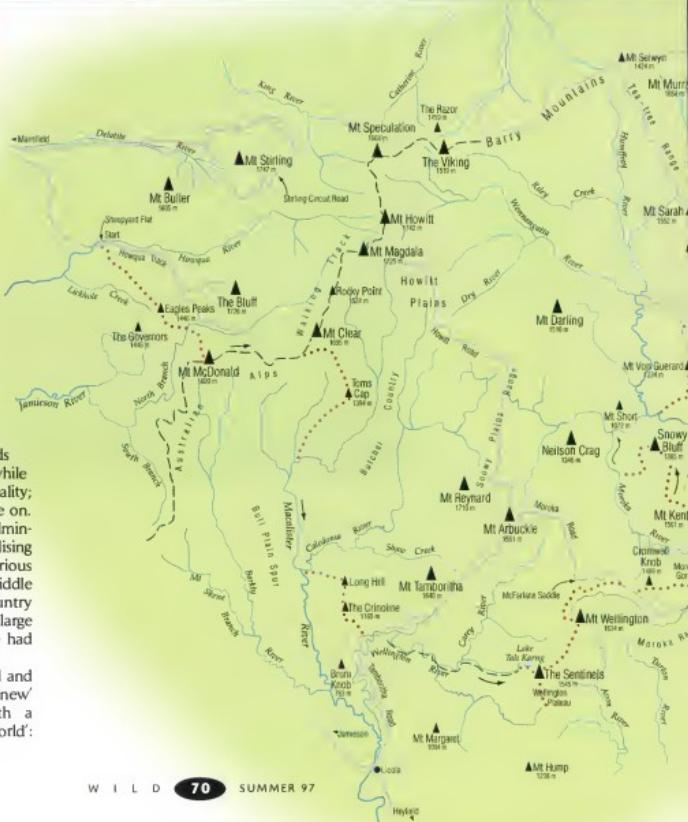


Sunset from the Blue Rag Range.  
The Crosscut Saw is on the horizon  
near the left, Mt Cobbler on the  
right. *van der Knijff*

area's mighty spurs and quiet creeks, the idea had to be abandoned because of the continuing rain—not to mention a heavy dose of continuing lethargy. It was time for a rest-day or two. So the following few days were spent sleeping luxuriously long hours, waking to eat what ration of scroggin could be sacrificed at that stage, then slipping once again into a realm of bizarre and wild dreams. On the last evening, while seated quietly on a knoll, we were treated to a brilliant show of light shimmering off retreating storm clouds. Obscured to the south lay Gippsland's farmlands and the 'real world'. It would be a while yet before we returned to that other reality for now, however, it was time to move on.

A day's walk away the plateau culminated at Mt Wellington and the tantalising and windswept views into the mysterious territory of the lower Moroka and middle Wonnangatta Rivers and the country immediately to their east. This was a large chunk of the unknown for which we had come to search.

A little later we crossed a lone road and John and Peter joined our ranks as 'new' walking partners, greeting us with a welcome injection from that 'real world': fresh food!



Camped on a sandbank on the Moroka River several evenings later, a closer-than-usual study of the map revealed that we had placed ourselves in an awkward position. Although we had managed to surmount Snowy Bluff—another magnificent peak—it was now obvious that two factors had placed us behind our intended schedule: the unrelenting humidity and heat which unfortunately had returned

again scanned it intently for a feasible, alternative route. We slowly came to the hesitant but foregone conclusion that we'd have to cut corners off our originally intended route.

Conveniently, to begin with this entailed wading through at times thigh-deep water down the Moroka. Thick scrub had curtailed any progress on either bank. As the day wore on we occasionally confided to each other our belief that we had some time up our sleeves—maybe a day or two—things were not *that* bad; or maybe it was just an attempt at much-needed reassurance. Still, we would somehow have to make up for our slower than anticipated progress. As we headed into an unknown territory of confusingly interlocking spurs I could easily sense the group's uneasiness and trepidation.

Ultimately our gamble did not pay off and we were forced to trade the deep oases of the Moroka for another series of dry and lifeless ridges as we approached the isolation of Mt Von Guerard. Parched and weary at lunch, we continued upward towards its scrawny peak, the climb a slow, painful, sweaty, scratchy, tiring and debilitating crawl on our knees. Prickly growth engulfed us.

Nearing the top after struggling for most of the day, we longed for breaks in the monotonous, wearisome vegetation; they never appeared. Instead, our final and only reward was a metal pole, less than a metre in height, on the dry, forested summit. Its skin of paint was cracked and peeling, no doubt from exposure to many scorching summers. That relentless part of our brains where impatience dwells threw up niggling thoughts about our questionable supply of water and our remoteness from that night's intended camp; this provoked a further bout of swearing and more scowling.

Pushing on the next day, a poignant image startled us as we traversed another dreary ridge, laid waste by logging. A small, dying native chick lay on a forestry road. Click. A photo taken in place of a memory. As if by deadly appointment a logging truck rumbled along the road toward us. We stepped aside and moved on. Our crooked route, which zigzagged its way up, over and around some of the more inaccessible areas of the Alps, had shown us that even here signs of 'civilisation' were never far away. Several days' walk later a small, wooden post beside a fire track hinted at the fragility of remnant bush areas. Capped with the inscription 'Alpine National Park boundary', the post represented an invisible delineation between National Park and a surrounding expanse of vulnerability. However, our

traverse from the remote sentinels of peaks to the hidden valleys had—despite our swearing and arguing—instilled in us a tiny portion of courage and hope for the survival of open and wild spaces.

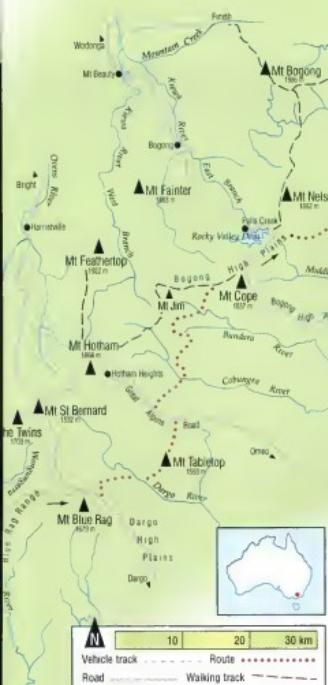
Cool stands of towering alpine ash began to refresh mind and body as we slipped into the depths of another magnificent valley, the Wongungarra. Ardent conservationist Jamie Pittcock spoke of this valley in *Wild* no 42: 'This short visit to the Wongungarra has inspired me and strengthened my determination to see it permanently protected. May it remain free of the damage wrought on other alpine valleys.' Jamie and fellow biologist Jean-Marc Hero had come to study the spotted tree frog—Victoria's rarest. The last of its kind in the Victorian Alps, the Wongungarra is a pristine river valley and a timeless sanctuary. May it remain that way. (See Green Pages, page 25)

During the past two weeks we had been privileged to admire many delightful creeks and rivers—from the upper Jamieson to the Moroka—but the sensation of finally coming to rest beside the waters of the Wongungarra had much greater significance. For us it marked the transition from the reaches of the Wonnangatta–Moroka area—spectacular, craggy but tinder dry—to the lushness and moisture of the higher and cooler Bogongs. Near Mt Hotham, John and Peter headed for lower ground, ultimately bound for the comforts of civilisation and home.

Our highest camp—four days later—was also our last: Mt Bogong. Camped on its sweeping, boomerang-shaped summit crest, it was a time to think, to unwind, to relax. Memories of Sheepyard Flat and the ride out to it in the back of a ute—which is how our walk had begun in the shadow of Mt Buller 24 days before—seemed utterly unreal. Australia Day, and our finishing point, were now only a day or two away.

Reviewing our adventure several days later, a hint of doubt flickered across my mind—it had certainly been a great trip, but it had been very taxing. We had walked nearly 350 kilometres and had each endured much hardship for the sake of a few special moments. The question nagged at me: had it been worth it? Other long trips had left me with similar thoughts—this one, in particular, had caused more than its fair share of pain. I had lost weight. The disturbing memories of many windless, sweltering days lingered. We were all dog-tired. I cast back another thought—to the amber light and chilly crispness of our last evening on Mt Bogong when Bogong moths had fluttered in a cascade of warm air wafting up from below. Looking back in my mind's eye across the peaks and troughs of the wild, stony sea upon which we had journeyed, I knew the answer. I still do. ☺

*Stephen Curran* is a qualified environmental science teacher and is also a keen bushwalker, cross-country skier and, occasionally, a climber. After a short stint working in outdoors shops, he joined the staff of *Wild* early in 1996. By his own admission he still carries too much in his rucksack but nevertheless manages to visit and 'lose himself' in Australia's wild places.



with a vengeance; and the groggy, late starts to each day. It was hard to believe that snow had fallen only days before.

However, as we floated on our backs in a lovely, deep pool, it was easy to forget our predicament. The sunlight ebbed away to the west, the sky was painted blue-black in the east, and the first stars appeared.

Perspiration once again poured freely from our bodies during the following morning. The coolness of early morning belied yet another scorching day—how had it become so hot so quickly? The heat seemed to intensify the array of bush colours around us. The almost fluorescent hues reminded me of bush paintings I'd studied at school—had it been those of Arthur Streeton? Nicki nervously bit her lower lip and stared vacantly at the map. Peter occasionally murmured a word or two as, dazzled by the white light, we



# Armchair

Bushwalking by the book, with Alex Hopkins

**H**ow did your forebears get around before the advent of trains and planes, cars and buses? Did they ride a horse, or travel in a coach or on a cart? Perhaps, if they were lucky. By far the most common form of transport, however, was shanks's pony: your own two feet.

My grandmother—a tough old bird, five foot nothing (150 centimetres) and the mother of eight—loved walking. On family holidays in the country we children would be route marched day after day by this little old lady in sandals. As a nipper I longed for a horse. One day I complained to my grandfather that I hated all that walking. Did I have to go? 'Don't worry, Alex,' he said. 'Today you're going on shanks's pony.' I couldn't believe it. A horse at last! My heart soared. I rushed into the yard, whooping with excitement. I can remember to this day how bitterly disappointed I was when I found out what he really meant. Betrayed by 'the olds' again. I liked my grandfather but sometimes he could be a right bastard.

Another old man I knew loved to tell how he walked eight miles (13 kilometres) to work and eight miles home in the evening and humped coal eight hours a day in between. It is hard to imagine how life has changed in just three or four generations. Ask the oldest people you know how much they walked in their younger days. There are a lot of interesting stories to be uncovered, but be warned: you are likely to get an earful about how lazy people are today and how we don't realise how well off we are...blah, blah, blah.

Walking for pleasure is something you grow into. "...it is a recurring feature in the story of people who walk for pleasure that many only come to do so in later life" (Miles Jebb, *Walkers*). Walking tours, especially in the UK and France, are very popular with older, active Australians. My local library has a pile of guidebooks to walks in other parts of the world. One, chosen at random, *Walking in England* by Roger Redfern, has been borrowed more than 20 times. The English classic *Journey Through Britain* by John Hillaby was still in print 20 years after it first appeared. Also popular with armchair travellers are Wainwright's books. My own copy of *Wainwright on the Pennine Way* is lavishly illustrated and a constant pleasure to browse through.

Armchair walkers can also dip into nineteenth century literature which has a great many accounts of people undertaking long walks simply in order to get around. In

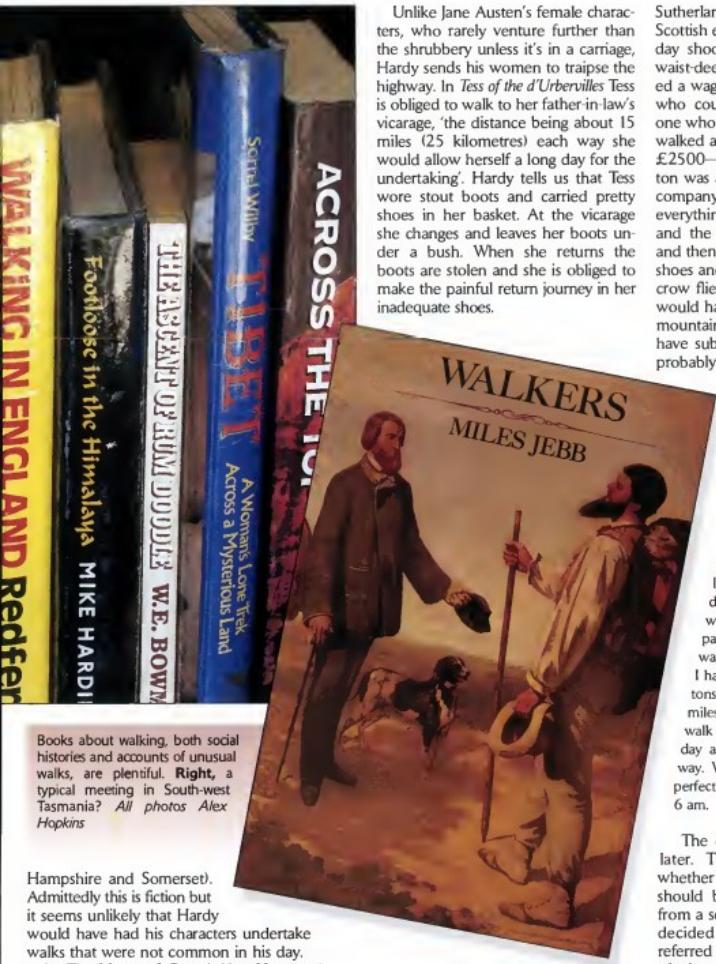


*David Copperfield*, for example, the young David is encouraged to run away from his demeaning job washing bottles and go to his godmother, no more than a week's walk away. But to my mind, the author who gives the most vivid pictures of long-distance walking in his novels is Thomas Hardy. Having his characters walk allows Hardy to give detailed accounts of the landscape, the season and the sky. Evelyn Waugh got it right when he said: 'The human eye receives the most vivid images when the observer's feet are planted firmly on the ground.'

The distances walked by Hardy's characters are quite impressive. In *Jude the Obscure* the schoolmaster Gillingham becomes so interested in a friend's affairs that he visits him two or three times a week 'although, there and back, it was a journey of nine

miles (15 kilometres), which had to be performed between tea and supper, after a hard day's work in school'. Also in *Jude the Obscure* we meet a spooky walker named Physician Vibert, a quack selling medicine. 'Walking somewhat slowly' Ijudel was overtaken by a light-footed pedestrian wearing an extraordinarily tall hat, a swallow-tailed coat, and a watch-chain that danced madly and threw around scintillations of sky-light as its owner swung along on a pair of thin legs and noiseless boots. Jude, beginning to feel lonely, endeavoured to keep up with him. 'Well, my man! I'm in a hurry, so you'll have to walk pretty fast if you keep alongside of me.' The distances the 'doctor' covered were enormous and extended nearly the whole length and breadth of Wessex (made up of Dorset, Devon, Cornwall, Wiltshire, Berkshire,

# Walking



Unlike Jane Austen's female characters, who rarely venture further than the shrubbery unless it's in a carriage, Hardy sends his women to traipse the highway. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* Tess is obliged to walk to her father-in-law's vicarage, 'the distance being about 15 miles (25 kilometres) each way she would allow herself a long day for the undertaking'. Hardy tells us that Tess wore stout boots and carried pretty shoes in her basket. At the vicarage she changes and leaves her boots under a bush. When she returns the boots are stolen and she is obliged to make the painful return journey in her inadequate shoes.

Sutherland. Osbaldeston was staying on the Scottish estate of a friend and had spent the day shooting ducks and wading about in waist-deep water. After dinner he witnessed a wager between two other guests as to who could travel faster to Inverness, the one who travelled by coach or the one who walked across the country. The bet was for £2500—an enormous sum—and Osbaldeston was asked by the coach traveller to accompany the walker to make sure that everything was above board. Osbaldeston and the two challengers started off there and then, in evening dress and wearing thin shoes and silk stockings. The journey as the crow flies was about 75 miles but as they would have had to skirt several precipitous mountains in the Cairngorms, where many have subsequently perished, the walk was probably closer to 100 miles (160 kilometres). Osbaldeston recorded the following account in his diary:

We went straight across the mountains and it was a longish walk. I called to my servant to follow with my walking shoes and worsted stockings and the other walker did the same. They overtook us when we had gone about seven or eight miles [about 12 kilometres]. Fancy my disgust! My idiot brought me certainly worsted stockings, but instead of shoes a pair of tight Wellington boots... His excuse was that my shooting shoes were damp... I had to make the best of it with Wellingtons. The sole of one boot vanished 25 miles from Inverness, and I had to finish the walk barefooted. We walked all night, next day and next night raining torrents all the way. We crossed the Grampians, making a perfectly straight line, and got to Inverness at 6 am.

The coach traveller arrived four hours later. There was some dispute about whether or not the walking contestant should be disqualified for receiving help from a servant. Osbaldeston tells us: 'It was decided that the question should be referred to the great authority on pedestrism, Captain Barclay, but ultimately [the two privately agreed to drop it].'

Many long-distance walkers have undertaken their treks to provide material for a book. Often such tomes have been written by eccentrics but surely none more eccentric than Sebastian Snow, who

Books about walking, both social histories and accounts of unusual walks, are plentiful. Right, a typical meeting in South-west Tasmania? All photos Alex Hopkins

Hampshire and Somerset. Admittedly this is fiction but it seems unlikely that Hardy would have had his characters undertake walks that were not common in his day.

In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Henchard decides to go to Elizabeth Jane's wedding. Hardy tells us: 'He started on foot, two mornings before St Martin's-tide, allowing himself about 16 miles (26 kilometres) to perform for each of the three days' journey.'

Of course, real life is stranger than fiction and Tess's experience is topped by that of a nineteenth-century eccentric named George Osbaldeston and recorded in *The Mad Hatters: Great Sporting Eccentrics of the Nineteenth Century* by Douglas



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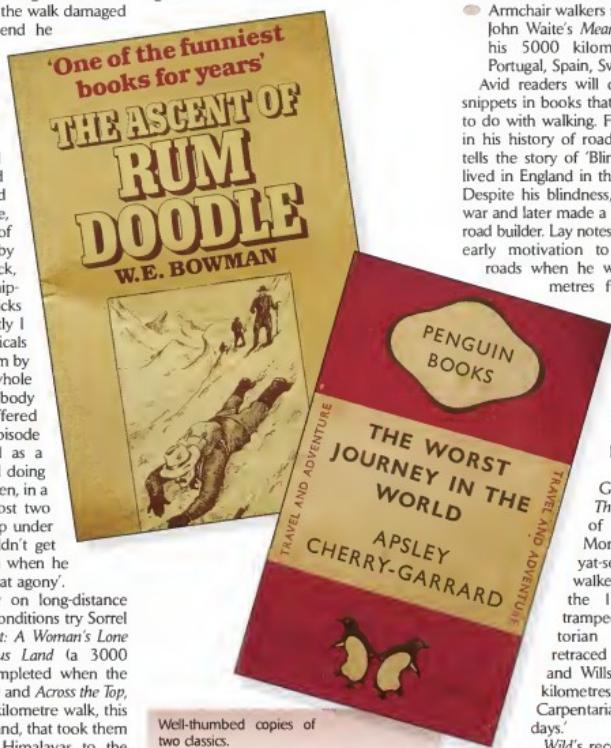
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recounts his adventures in *The Rucksack Man*. Snow walked the length of South America from Tierra del Fuego to Panama City—a distance of 14 500 kilometres—taking a little over a year. This seems fast going but Snow tells us how he did it. 'Walk for one hour, rest for 5 or 10 minutes... I could keep this up for 12 hours or more and had even done it for 68 kilometres at a stretch for by now I was a superbly attuned walking machine. It was the going-on-foreverness that attracted me.' And later: 'I had made a brisk walk from Latacunga of approximately 100 kilometres in 18 hours and 10 minutes at an average altitude of 2600 metres.' Inevitably the walk damaged his health and at the end he noted: 'I had traversed the continent of South America on foot... Only will-power kept me going. Underweight by five stone 135 kilograms, two sprained ankles, both swollen and discoloured, my feet and ankles covered with gore, blood and bites, a mass of suppurating sores, stung by a hornet on the neck, bitten by a scorpion, nipped by a vampire bat, ticks under the skin... Evidently I had lost too many chemicals to be able to replace them by a few injections. The whole chemical balance of my body was upset.' Snow suffered along the way; the episode that sticks in my mind as a quintessential 'Why am I doing this?' experience was when, in a severe dust storm, he lost two pairs of contact lenses up under his eyelids and he couldn't get them out. I believe him when he says, 'They gave me great agony'.

For a woman's view on long-distance walking under difficult conditions try Sorrel Wilby's two books, *Tibet: A Woman's Lone Trek Across a Mysterious Land* (a 3000 kilometre lone trek, completed when the author was 24 years old) and *Across the Top*, her account of a 6500 kilometre walk, this time with her new husband, that took them from one end of the Himalayas to the other. Wilby, who has been mentioned from time to time in *Wild*, is obviously a feisty young woman and a strong walker. Her books are a good read for anyone interested in the rigours and rewards of walking among the world's highest mountains. In *Across the Top* she notes that, in contrast to her lightweight expedition, caravans to the Karakoram were sometimes up to 600 men strong—shades of WE Bowman's description of *The Ascent of Rum-doodle*, a hilarious little book that satirises such huge expeditions, heroic adventuring and 'the British way'.

If Snow and Wilby seem to have done it the hard way, spare a thought for Richard and Adrian Crane, who ran the entire

length of the Himalayas, taking 101 days to complete the arduous journey. Their ascents totalled some 91 500 metres. Their complaints about the poor quality of Himalayan maps and the locals' lack of understanding about the geography of their own regions—never mind their country—will strike a familiar chord for readers who have trekked in the Himalayas. Running seems to me to be a doozy way to travel through such spectacular scenery and by the end of the book at least one of the brothers is resentful that they have gone so far and missed so much. One can only agree.



Well-thumbed copies of two classics.

It is not hard to gather up an armful of books about trekking in the Himalayas, many with spectacular photographs. The same is true of the Antarctic. There are just too many to overview here.

The armchair walker also has a lot of choices of books which have resulted from long-distance walks in other parts of the world. Some of these include:

*500 Mile Walkies* by Mark Wallington. This is a humorous account of a walking/camping holiday with a dog named Boogie. Mark and Boogie traversed 850 kilometres of the UK's south-west coast.

In his book *Patagonia* Bruce Chatwin describes his trek in search of a mysterious piece of skin thought to be from a prehistoric brontosaurus. But be warned: this is a strange little book and the author has a rather wacky sense of humour.

*Korea* by Simon Winchester is a charming account of the author's 500 kilometre trek through South Korea and of the people he met along the way.

Robin Neillands, the author of an account of an extensive traverse of Spain called simply *Spain*, has also written two books about walking in France.

Armchair walkers might be interested in John Waite's *Mean Feat*, an account of his 5000 kilometre walk through Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and Italy.

Avid readers will often find fascinating snippets in books that ostensibly have little to do with walking. For example, MG Lay in his history of roads, *Ways of the World*, tells the story of 'Blind Jack' Metcalf who lived in England in the eighteenth century. Despite his blindness, Metcalf fought in a war and later made a name for himself as a road builder. Lay notes: 'Blind Jack received early motivation to improve England's roads when he walked the 300 kilometres from London to his home near Harrogate in six days.' Lay goes on to say: 'Although this was a long time, it was noticeably shorter than that taken by a coach carrying his friends.'

Nearer to home, Graeme Wheeler in *The Scroggin Eaters* tells of George 'Chinese' Morrison, adviser to Sun-yat-sen and long-distance walker extraordinaire. 'In the 1880s he not only tramped the southern Victorian coastline but also retraced the route of Burke and Wills, covering the 3200 kilometres from the Gulf of Carpentaria to Adelaide in 123 days.'

*Wild's* recent article on Sydney adventurer Peter Treseder (see *Wild* no 51)—the so-called mild-mannered bank employee-cum-maverick mountain man—suggests that there are still adventurous individuals eager to do the challenging and the unexpected—and many more content to sit at home and read about it. It is salutary to remember that the word 'travel' comes from the French *travail*—'work' or 'hardship'—which in turn comes from the Latin *trepaliūm*, meaning an instrument of torture! ☺

Alex Hopkins (see *Wild* no 41) is a bushwalker, cross-country skier and photographer who in his other life is a Melbourne academic. His most recent travels have been in India, China (where he taught for a semester in a Chinese university) and Egypt.

# Feathered friends

Birds of Queensland's wet tropics, by *Lloyd Nielsen*



A buff-breasted paradise kingfisher flies to its nest in a termite mound. Right, a male Victoria's riflebird advertises for a mate.





Lloyd Nielsen has studied Australian birds in the field for almost four decades. He specialises in finding rare and elusive species such as the never-photographed buff-breasted button-quail. His second regional field guide, *The Clipsal Guide to the Birds of the Wet Tropics and Environs* was recently published. He lives at 'the gateway to Cape York'.



**Left,** a red-necked crake, an elusive aquatic species.

**Below,** fawn-breasted bowerbirds at home.



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# The Bunya Mountains

**Little-known Queensland gems, by Peter Sykes**



Easily dismissed by bushwalkers as too crowded and overdeveloped, Queensland's Bunya Mountains National Park nevertheless has an occasional surprise for the truly enthusiastic.

The park is 109 kilometres north of Toowoomba in the State's Darling Downs region and is readily accessible from Brisbane. It is Queensland's second-oldest National Park and has recently experienced a popularity explosion, being frequently visited by both Australian and international tourists, particularly during holiday periods. A bitumen road dissecting the park gives easy access to most of the scenic attractions.

For about 30 000 years the park served as an Aboriginal meeting ground. Local

A bunya pine. Note the marks made by Aborigines to enable them to climb the tree to gather its delicious nuts. Peter Sykes

tribes would gather for ceremonies that included hunting, feasting, mock fighting and corroborees. Some similar activities are still being conducted within park boundaries; not by Aborigines but, unfortunately, by visitors who lack the environmental awareness possessed intuitively by the park's traditional users.

However, the park's overwhelming natural beauty cannot be denied. Its vegetation is interesting and diverse;

## the walks

### at a glance

**GRADE** Moderate

**LENGTH** One–two days

**TYPE** Mountain scenery

**REGION** Central Queensland

**BEST TIME**

Cooler months

**SPECIAL POINTS**

Camping in National Park is only permitted in official camp-sites

wildlife abounds. Just as the first loggers of the 1860s must have stood in awe of the magnificent bunyas, so too do today's visitors.

Perhaps it is the island-like nature of the Bunya Mountains that gives the area its unique qualities. The colours, the trees, the fungi, the birds, the landscape; they are all like no other on Australia's east coast. How to protect this beautiful section of the Great Dividing Range from the development engulfing it is without a doubt one of the more difficult challenges facing the Queensland Government.

The recent debate over World Heritage listing of the region brings into focus the problems inherent in such a move. No doubt the listing would increase pressure from commercial interests and developers fully to exploit the area's tourist potential.

The locals are a mixed lot. Some are long established in the district, but many are newcomers. Members of the Bunya Mountains Natural History Association (NHA) have long been active in their efforts to preserve the park's environmental integrity and promote its natural treasures. One cannot help but feel that even this group is becoming pessimistic about the park's future. Ten years ago members of the NHA would delight in telling

amusing stories about local legends and some of the history connected with the park's development. Now more often than not their stories are tales of destructive visitors, and increasing numbers of them. They are alarmed by those who refuse to remove their domestic dogs from the park, and speak affectionately of the local ranger's attempts to come to grips with the situation.

Off-track walkers can still find plenty to interest them but until the tide of overuse is stemmed, their consciences will not be at rest. The walks suggested here expose both sides of the argument and will, it is hoped, encourage walkers to take affirmative action to save the park.

The many natural grasslands or 'balds' found on the mountain have provided geographers with one of the area's most intriguing puzzles. A plausible history of their formation has been pieced together—it concerns the relationship between traditional Aboriginal land-care practices and the subsequent climatic changes that affected the evolution of rainforest ecosystems.

Local landowners often complain of their difficulty in growing native trees and shrubs on those balds which have now been developed. Only in the wildest parts of the park, such as the Long Plain, does one see native vegetation successfully growing in these astonishing geographical features. Even then, vegetation not normally found in Queensland is prevalent

ent. A lone mountain she-oak can be found on the Long Plain.

The abundance of wildlife in the area is also impressive. Although introduced and feral species seem to be increasing in numbers, they are not out of control yet. Bird-watchers will find a proliferation of colourful species on display, the most notable being the king parrot and the crimson rosella.

#### ● When to go

If well prepared, any time of the year is a good time to visit but conditions will be ideal if good rain has recently fallen, especially during the cooler months.

#### ● Maps

Two good maps of the area are suitable for bush navigation. The *Mowbray 1:50 000 topographical map* can be obtained through any Queensland Sunmap office. A better map is the Queensland Forest Service's *Bunya Mountains 1:25 000 sheet*. Although it has little colour it clearly shows ridges, vegetation and clifflines that are not on the topographical map.

#### ● Further information

Published bushwalking literature on the park is hard to find. The NHA, which is at the main camping ground at Dandabah ('dandy-ba'), can provide very helpful information. Bushwalkers can also turn to the Queensland Forest Service's Yarraman office for information concerning bush camping. Permission to camp is dependent on prevailing conditions and forestry activity.

#### ● Camping

Bush camping is not allowed within the boundaries of the National Park. If permission cannot be obtained to camp in the adjoining State Forests, bookings in advance are recommended for any of the official National Park camping grounds.

#### ● Warnings

The main concerns for bushwalkers are the sudden drops in temperature and the scrub ticks that feed on passers-by. Both are common and both can cause considerable discomfort.

Armed with a good map, off-track walks can provide the bushwalker with a way to escape the crush of human activity on the main walking tracks. Please respect any area that is officially closed for regeneration.

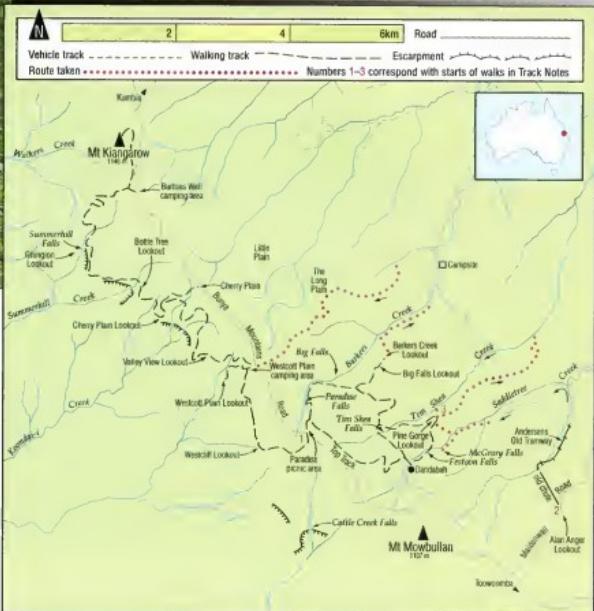
Navigation- and route-finding skills are essential for a successful walk. The vegetation can be scratchy but is rarely impenetrable. Long sleeves and long pants will give protection from discomforts such as nettles and thorns.

#### 1 Burtons Well–Barkers Creek–Long Plain–Westcott Plain

Several good walks are possible and car shuttling is the most effective way to ensure a good variety of track- and wilderness walking. Don't miss seeing at least one or two good views of the Darling Downs and some of the prettier waterfalls.

The following walk is described as a two-day one but you may wish to design your own walk to allow more time to enjoy the park's natural beauty. This walk includes a sampling of everything the park has to

## The Bunya Mountains





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offer. The brief off-track descriptions that follow can be used to plan a worthwhile, longer trip. A car shuttle is required.

**Day one** (15 kilometres). Leave a vehicle at the Burtons Well camping area and begin the walk at the Paradise picnic area. Take the signposted Top Track to Dandabah, which is likely to be a hive of human activity. Be sure to visit the NHA headquarters and talk to a member if you get the chance.

From Dandabah proceed to Pine Gorge Lookout by way of Festoon Falls. Koalas can sometimes be seen near the lookout.

From the bald, locate an old forestry track to the south-west. Follow the crest of the ridge to the Long Plain. On this ridge will be the most difficult going you will encounter.

It is well worth having a good look around the Long Plain. Although more vegetated than most balds the views are superb and the feeling of isolation is satisfying.

At the plain's most southerly point it is necessary to veer east-south-east back into the rainforest. Once in the forest, immediately loop back up on to the ridge on

## 2 Andersen's Old Tramway/McGroarty Falls

After seeking advice from the NHA or the ranger at Dandabah, begin at Alan Anger Lookout on the Maidenwell Road. Find your way down the old chute to the remains of Andersen's Old Tramway and follow it until it turns into a forestry road. You will soon come across a road turning into a track that runs parallel to Saddletree Creek. Follow it until you can easily get on to the creek. Rock hop up to McGroarty Falls.

From here, find a way up to Pine Gorge Lookout by following the creek back downstream for a short distance and then ascending the ridge to the north-west.

## 3 Tim Shea Creek

Follow the faint tracks north-east from Pine Gorge Lookout. When the ridge drops off sharply, find your way down to the creek by good foot tracks. Camping is plentiful on the State Forest boundary.



Continue on the Scenic Circuit to Tim Shea Falls and turn right at the track junction.

Take the next signposted track to the Big Falls and Barkers Creek Lookouts. If time permits, continue a short way past the turn-off to an impressive bald at the top of Big Falls. The views from this area are excellent and birds of prey can often be seen soaring overhead.

From the Barkers Creek Lookout, follow a faint track down the ridge to the northeast. Stay on the bald for as long as possible, eventually heading north-west to drop down on to Barkers Creek. It is possible to follow the creek upstream to the bottom of Big Falls from this point but it isn't worth the trip unless there has been recent, heavy rainfall.

Follow Barkers Creek downstream for about one-and-a-half kilometres until you reach a forestry road which crosses the creek (grid reference 612294). The area has several good camp-sites and sections of the creek run all year round except in times of drought.

**Day two** (15 kilometres). Head north along the road to an impressive bald containing an experimental plot of pine. Dingoes are often sighted here.

A green cat bird feeding its young. Right, the stinkhorn's distinctive odour often results in low-grade bush humour. Ken Chapman

which you were just before. You will probably see a few trees with blue blazes on them.

The blue blazes—a common feature in State Forests—mark an old track which leads to the top of Big Falls. Unfortunately, this track is almost impossible to follow. After the inevitable 'where in the blue blazes are we?' puns, make your way up the ridge to a small peak and then down to the main road.

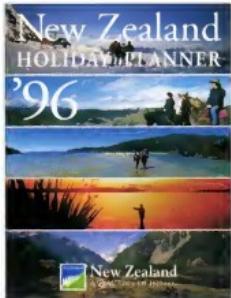
By now you will be well and truly tired of dodging heavily vegetated gullies and other encumbrances and Westcott Plain camping area should be close by. From here, take the Westcott and Cherry Plain Tracks to Burtons Well.

Along these tracks are many fine views of the Darling Downs and nearby clifflines. Take in as many as time permits. Both tracks are well signposted.



Follow the creek upstream to an unmarked waterfall and a small swimming hole above it. Climb back on to the ridge to your east and follow it back to the lookout. ☀

Peter Sykes is a teacher who has walked extensively in the Bunya Mountains and elsewhere. Well known in the Gympie area, he is active in conservation issues and runs environmentally aware bushwalks in his spare time.



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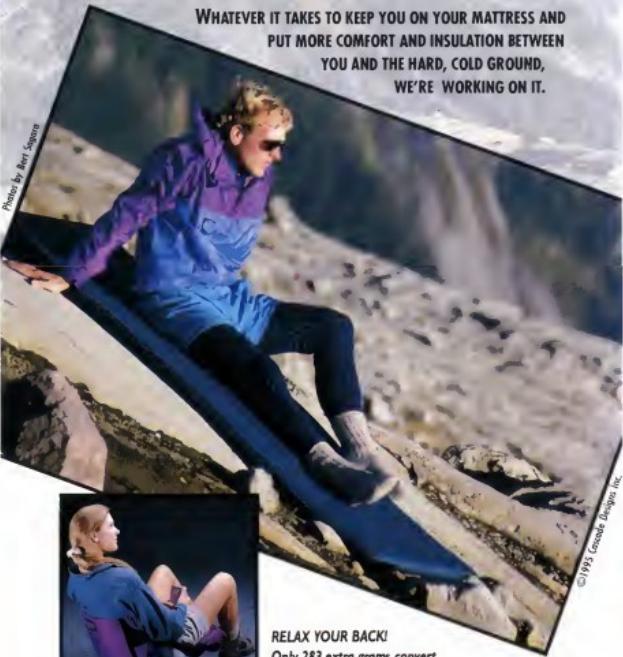
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# Four-season tents

**John Chapman sticks 'em up**

The ideal four-season tent has lots of space inside, excellent ventilation, pitches very quickly, weighs next to nothing, is bombproof in all weather conditions and is given away with your cereal. Of course, no tent available in the real world could satisfy all these fantasies and you have to compromise on most of the criteria when selecting one. Because people's priorities vary, this survey presents as much information as possible to make your selection easier rather than ranking tents in order of 'best to worst'.

All the tents surveyed here have been described by the suppliers as being for four seasons. They vary from domes

which are designed for expeditions and are almost indestructible, to some tunnels that are on the borderline of being for four-season or three-season use. Four-season use is assumed to include heavy snowfalls and adverse weather conditions like those encountered in Tasmania.

usually possess. This design performs very well in strong winds but is heavier (there are more poles) and often needs two people to put it up.

The other category is a hybrid design called a 'tunnel/dome', which is essentially a tunnel tent but with crossing poles



This survey summarises the findings of the writer, who was selected for the task because of, among other things, his knowledge of the subject and his impartiality. The survey was checked and verified by Glenn van der Knauff, and reviewed by at least three of *Wild*'s editorial staff. It is based on the items' availability and specifications at the time of this issue's production; however, ranges and specifications may have changed in the weeks since then.

Some aspects of this survey, such as the assessment of value and features—and especially the inclusion/exclusion of certain products—entail a degree of subjective judgment on the part of the author, the referee and *Wild*, space being a key consideration.

'Value' is based primarily features and quality relative to price. A more expensive product may be better suited for some uses or be judged more highly by someone whose main concerns are features and quality.

An important criterion for inclusion in a *Wild* survey is 'wide availability'. To qualify, a product must usually be stocked by a number of specialist outdoors shops in the central business districts of major Australian capital and other cities.

Despite these efforts to achieve accuracy, impartiality, comprehensiveness and usefulness, no survey is perfect. Apart from the obvious human elements that may affect assessment, the quality, materials and specifications of any product may vary markedly from batch to batch and even from sample to sample. It is ultimately the responsibility of readers to determine what is best for their particular circumstances and the use they have in mind for gear reviewed.

**Design.** The tents have been grouped into one of four categories. The most basic shape is the 'tunnel', which has three poles that are essentially parallel to each other with the centre pole being larger than the two outside ones. The 'tapered tunnel' has the largest pole at the door end and this usually improves ventilation but is not quite as stable in strong winds.

The sturdiest design shape of all is the 'dome', which is basically a hemisphere with an hexagonal floor or fly plan. This design is also characterised by extensive use of crossing poles which provide much of the rigidity these tents

No matter what your tent, it's more comfortable on grass. (Below Mt Clarke, Snowy Mountains, New South Wales)  
Andrew Barnes

as used in the dome design to provide more rigidity in wind.

**Maximum internal dimensions.** These have been measured as the maximum dimensions along the ground of the inner floor on the pitched tent. Many catalogues overstate these measurements and list instead the overall size of the floor material which includes the raised bathtub sides of the floor.

**Total weight.** This includes everything as supplied when the tent is purchased. Sometimes this includes seam-sealers and other extras but these make little difference to the overall weight.

# EXTREME CONDITIONS REQUIRE EXTREME SHELTER



EPOCH 2

**WEIGHT:** 3.6 Kgs/7lb 11.5oz **CAPACITY:** 2 Person **POLES:** 4 Easton 7075 aluminium **INNER:** Breathable 70 denier ripstop **OUTER:** Polyester ripstop ultra 40D, 3000mm waterproof PU coating, seam sealed. **FLOOR:** Nylon, 5000+ PU waterproof coating, seam sealed. **DIMENSIONS:** Height = 1150mm/45.3in Width = 1220-1580mm/48.03-62.2in Length = 2360mm/97.7in



EXTREME DOME

**WEIGHT:** 4.0 Kgs/8lb 9.5oz **CAPACITY:** 3-4 Person **POLES:** 5 Easton 7075 aluminium **INNER:** Breathable 70 denier ripstop **OUTER:** Polyester ripstop ultra 40D, 3000mm PU waterproof coating, seam sealed. **FLOOR:** Nylon, 5000+ PU waterproof coating, seam sealed. **DIMENSIONS:** Height = 1300mm/51.2in Width = 2600mm/102.4 in, Length = 2100mm/82.7in



DRAGONFLY

**WEIGHT:** 2.9 Kgs/5lb 15.2oz **CAPACITY:** 2 Person **POLES:** 2 Easton 7075 aluminium **INNER:** Breathable 70 denier ripstop **OUTER:** Polyester ripstop ultra 40D, 3000mm PU coating, seam sealed. **FLOOR:** Nylon, 5000+ PU waterproof coating, seam sealed. **DIMENSIONS:** Height = 1080mm/42.5in, Width = 1300-1500mm/51.2-63in, Length = 2350mm/92.5in

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**Materials.** Modern tents have a proofed nylon floor, inners of very light, water-repelling fabrics or mesh and a waterproof fly. The fly material can be either the traditional, proofed nylon or a proofed polyester. Polyester is a recent innovation and there has been much hype about its superior properties. Tests show that it is more resistant to ultraviolet light and its strength is less likely to

degrade with extended exposure to sunlight. If you intend to leave your tent pitched for weeks at a time in one place, this characteristic might be significant. It depends on your intended use; in my own tents the proofing has failed well before any noticeable weakening of the cloth occurred.

Claims about polyester being a stronger thread than nylon seem unjustified; they have about the same strength. One

manufacturer, Macpac, has used lighter cloth (hence weaker base strength) and incorporated double Ripstop threads for tear resistance. The cloth is claimed to have a stronger tear resistance but that strength is due to the extra thread, not to the polyester fabric. However, most polyester used by other manufacturers is woven with single Ripstop threads in the same way as Ripstop nylon; visually it is

## Wild Gear Survey

### Four-season tents

	intended capacity, people	Design	Maximum internal dimensions (length x width x height), centimetres	Total weight, kilograms	Outer material	Number of poles	Number of pegs (minimum/maximum)	Number of vestibules	Number of entrances	Rooftess	Ventilation	Ease of pitch	Wind tolerance	Snow shedding	Value	Approx. \$
<b>Adventure Designs China</b>																
Humpback	2	Dome	207 x 144 x 115	3.3	Polyester	3	2/12	2	2	***	***	**	***½	***½	***	470
Diamond Back	2/3	Dome	205 x 128 x 123	3.9	Polyester	3	2/12	2	2	**	***	***	***	***	***	500
<b>Eureka Korea</b>																
Yellowstone	2	Dome	230 x 143 x 121	3.7	Nylon	3	4/14	2	2	****	**	**	**	***	***	440
Polar Storm	3	Tunnel	230 x 169 x 122	4.5	Nylon	3	4/14	2	2	***	***	***	***	***	***	580
K2	3	Dome	260 x 220 x 125	4.0	Nylon	5	2/20	1	2	****	*	**	***½	***½	***	700
<b>Fairydown New Zealand</b>																
Assault	2	Dome	210 x 106 x 109	3.2	Nylon	3	2/16	2	2	**	**	**	***½	****	**	770
<b>First Light Korea</b>																
Shadow 3000	3	Tunnel	244 x 192 x 110	3.2	Nylon	3	4/20	2	2	***	**	***	**	***	**½	400
<b>Kathmandu Korea</b>																
Mountain	2	T/D	220 x 134 x 107	4.2	Polyester	4	4/18	2	2	***	**	***	***	***½	***	800
Expedition	3	Dome	213 x 195 x 120	4.8	Polyester	5	4/16	2	2	****	**	***	***	***	***	1000
<b>Macpac New Zealand</b>																
Minaret	2	Tunnel	250 x 120 x 96	2.6	Polyester	2	4/14	1	1	*	***	***	***	***	***	660
Olympus	2/3	Tunnel	220 x 134 x 115	3.6	Polyester	3	4/16	2	2	***	**	***	***	***½	***½	870
Spectrum XPD	3/4	Dome	205 x 205 x 122	4.0	Polyester	4	3/19	2	2	****	*	*	***	**½	**	1099
<b>Mont Fiji</b>																
Epoch 2	2	T/D	236 x 153 x 106	3.5	Polyester	4	4/13	2	2	**	**	**	***½	***	**	750
Extreme Dome	3/4	Dome	252 x 200 x 125	3.9	Polyester	5	4/21	2	2	****	**	***	***½	***½	***	970
<b>Paddy Pallin New Zealand</b>																
Galaxy	2/3	Tunnel	220 x 140 x 115	3.5	Nylon	3	4/16	2	2	***	**	***	***½	***	***	650
<b>Robens Bangladesh</b>																
Grey Highlander	2/3	Dome	210 x 198 x 98	3.7	Polyester	4	4/16	2	2	****	***	**	***	***	**	639
<b>Salewa China/Korea</b>																
Serra Leone	2	Dome	211 x 136 x 111	3.5	Polyester	3	2/18	2	2	***	*	*	***½	***½	***	500
Magnum Space	3	Dome	211 x 205 x 132	4.8	Polyester	3	2/18	2	2	**	*	*	***½	***½	***	600
<b>Snowgum Korea</b>																
Retreat	2	Tunnel	215 x 142 x 113	3.4	Polyester	3	4/16	2	2	****	**	***	***	***½	***	500
<b>Vango China</b>																
Carina	2	T/D	222 x 114 x 113	3.2	Nylon	4	2/14	1	1	****	**	***	***	***	**	460
Odyssey 300	—	T/D	222 x 152 x 110	4.6	Nylon	5	4/18	2	2	****	**	***	***½	***	***	725
Force Ten Extreme Mk3	2	Dome	221 x 125 x 104	4.9	Nylon	5	0/16*	2	2	****	**	*	***	***½	***	1160
<b>Walrus Korea</b>																
Tri-Star	3/4	Dome	208 x 208 x 115	4.2	Nylon	5	2/8	2	2	***	**	*	***	***	**	680
Skyline	2	Tunnel	260 x 195 x 120	3.3	Nylon	2**	3/11	1	2	****	**	***	***	***	***	730
<b>Wilderness Equipment Australia</b>																
Second Arrow	2	TT	210 x 136 x 191	2.8	Nylon	2	3/12	2	2	*	***	***	**	***	***	725
First Arrow	2/3	TT	212 x 150 x 115	3.1	Nylon	3	3/16	2	2	**	****	***	***	***	***	870

\* poor   \*\* average   \*\*\* good   \*\*\*\* excellent   T/D tunnel/dome   TT tapered tunnel   \* No pegs required in free-standing mode   \*\* One pole consists of five sections which are folded with the tent inner   The country listed after the manufacturer's name is the country in which the products are made

# Walrus Tri-Star

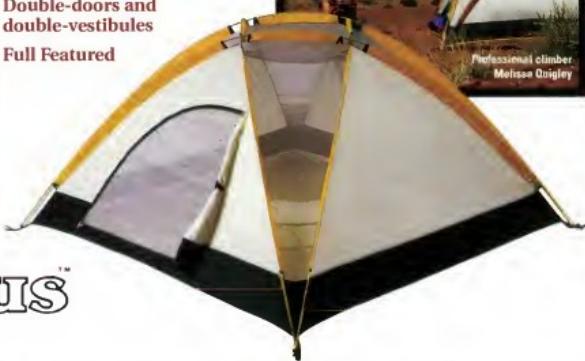
## Backpacker Magazine's "Top Tent"

If the Tri-Star were a car, it would qualify as "loaded." It comes equipped with four fat poles, dual doors, a fully seam-sealed fly and floor, good stakes, a mesh gear loft, and, best of all, a spacious vestibule over each door. Setup isn't the fastest, but to quote GMC's Brian Bazar, "You don't need to be a brain surgeon to figure it out."

The Tri-Star's wedgey vestibules direct wind up and over the doors. Bazar again: "We got dumped on by several severe storms—no problem." Inside, three can live in genuine comfort. We used the front vestibule as a foyer, and the rear one as a covered equipment dump. The GMC crews appreciated how the mesh roof vents, and cross ventilation between the doors kept the interior livable on sticky nights.

—*Backpacker Magazine, Sept. '94*

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hard to tell them apart. Nylon has been used successfully for over 20 years; it works well and tests have indicated that polyester will work well, too. There are bigger differences in quality of material compared to type of material and, as a general guide, the more detailed the technical information supplied about a material the better the quality of the cloth.

Some users seem to believe that a Rip-stop cloth cannot be torn. This is a fallacy. The thicker threads do resist tearing but all the lightweight cloths used on these tents can be torn—so take care.

**Poles.** All tents surveyed have aluminium, shock-corded poles. The Easton 7075 poles are acknowledged as the best available and are easily recognised by their gold colour. Some tents use softer poles which are usually black or silver in appearance and are often given the number 7001. While not as stiff as the 7075 poles they still perform well in most situations and usually bend rather than break when overstressed. Poles are made in a wide variety of diameters and it is important that you check carefully that you have the right one when purchasing a spare or replacement pole.

## Points to watch

### Interior size

Lie down and make sure that the inner is large enough for you and your companions to fit inside. Get up on your knees and test whether you can change your clothes easily. Putting on a shirt or a jacket while lying on the ground is not much fun.

### Bulk

The packed bulk of a four-season tent is often more of a problem than its actual weight. When buying a large tent make sure that you have enough pack space to carry it.

### Entrances

Entrances vary widely and you should test how difficult it is to get in and out. Consider what the tent will be like in poor weather when you are trying to remove your waterproof jacket as you crawl in.

### Ease of pitch

If you can, you should see a tent being put up, and take a tent down at least once before you buy it. Can the poles be inserted from either end? Are they the same size and is there a preferred order in which they should be erected? Are the pole ends difficult to attach and can adjustment be made so that the tent can always remain taut as it stretches and ages?

### Gear storage

Lofts or pockets are handy for small items. Are there attachment points for internal clothes-lines? Examine the storage space in both the inner and the vestibule. Is it out of the way or do you have to clamber over your gear when you are getting in or out? Two doors and vestibules help in this regard but you should check that the vestibule is high enough to stand your pack in. While you can lie your pack down, you are more likely to have to stand on it to get in and out of the tent.

Normally poles are completely removed from a tent when it is taken down. The exception in the survey is the Walrus Skyline where the main poles (five separate sections) are shock-corded together and remain inside the inner tent when it is folded.

**Pegs.** The minimum number of pegs indicated is that required to put up the tent and fly. The maximum number includes all peg- and storm-guy points.

**Roominess.** This takes into account the manufacturer's intended capacity and rates this against the inner area, gear storage, head clearance and overall space. Some tents with small innards rate well because they have huge vestibules while others with seemingly large innards have less useful space due to sloping walls or small doorways. A person's height and bulk and past experiences in a wide variety of tents should be considered together with this rating. As everybody has different needs for space, the best test is to lie down inside a tent and consider where you will want to place your gear and how you will use the space provided.

**Ventilation.** The position and size of ventilation points have been considered. Some designs tend to work better, with the tapered tunnel performing very well as the shape draws warm, moist air to the vent in the door. On the other hand domes, with their high innards, are harder to ventilate. Remember that vents do not work at all if they are not opened or kept clear (snow can collapse or block them or the force of the wind can shut them) and the direction of the wind also influences how well they work. No matter how well ventilated your tent, you will probably experience some unpleasant nights in warm, rainy weather.

**Ease of pitch.** Factors which affect this are continuous pole sleeves, width of pole sleeves (some are very narrow!), whether the poles cross (which makes it harder to erect the tent) and how different pole and material lengths are handled.

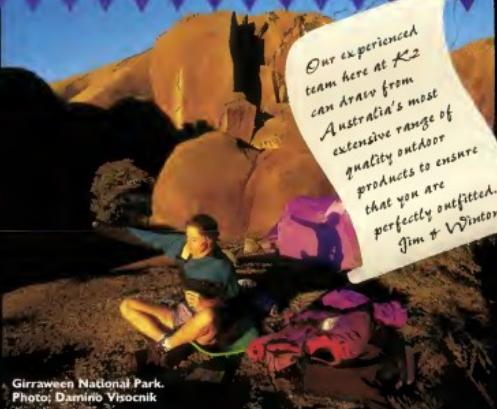
**Wind tolerance.** This rates the overall resistance of a tent to side forces. As we cannot test the tents in a wind-tunnel this rating is subjective and affected by the way I have seen the various designs perform in the field. Little features such as attachments between the fly and inner and internal stiffeners can make a big difference. In reality all the tents here perform well in wind and should survive most storms but those with higher ratings should be more comfortable as they are likely to be quieter and there should be less deformation of the tent shape. I have spent a few uncomfortable nights holding on to tent-poles even though I knew the tent would survive without my assistance.

**Snow shedding.** The more angled a tent panel, the more likely it is that snow will slide off it. Flat panels tend to gather snow and this rating is based on how close to horizontal the flattest panel is. Most dome tents tend to have some

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Girraween National Park.  
Photo: Damirio Visocnik



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almost flat panels and therefore have lower ratings in this table yet they generally perform well in the field as they are strong enough to support the snow. If you intend to camp often in the snow, look carefully at how large the flattest panels are and also look at whether the snow tends to slide over the doors or whether it falls away to the side. Some tents shed snow really well but bury the door very effectively at night.

**Value.** This is not simply a value-for-money rating. In rating each tent as a general-purpose, four-season tent I have not only considered the price but also how heavy the tent is, its overall features and quality, and its size. A low rating does not mean that the tent is poor; just that on the above criteria I would not rate it highly for my own use, which is mainly for extended, often arduous, trips in all weathers. Some of these models may make a superior three-season tent and be a 'better buy' if that is what you are looking for.

**Price.** This can vary widely. Some tents are frequently discounted and some manufacturers allow for this in their pricing structure. Others are hardly ever discounted. So shop around but do not expect huge discounts, particularly for the more expensive tents. When you take into account that over its lifetime a tent will only cost a couple of dollars a night to use, tents are really quite cheap considering how well they work.

Price does give some indication of quality and the amount of effort that went into the design. Tents made in Australia and New Zealand are generally higher in price but tend to be of excellent quality. Many tents made in Asian countries are also of high quality but they do vary more—examine the little things like stitching, the placement of features and the materials used and make enquiries about the company's reputation.

**Availability.** You will not find all the tents surveyed here available in any one shop or even in every State; there are only two brands (Eureka and Macpac) that are available almost everywhere. Tents take up lots of floor space and are expensive to stock—most shops carry only two or three brands. There are a dozen brands in this survey and to see a wide variety it is necessary to visit many shops. Local weather conditions also influence what a shop stocks so do not expect to find large numbers of these tents in the warmer States.

**Care.** Most tents come with a care-and-use pamphlet or have a tag sewn into the inner giving these details. Always make sure that your tent is thoroughly dried and aired before storing and keep it away from petroleum liquid fuels. With normal use a good tent should last many years and provide many comfortable, dry nights. ☐

*John Chapman* (see Contributors in *Wild* no 1) is one of Australia's most widely travelled and respected bushwalking writers. He is particularly well known for his books of Tasmanian track notes.

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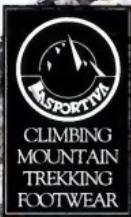
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Mount Scorpio, Western Arthur Range, Tasmania. Photo: Neil Blundy

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# Dry bags

No more soggy gear—a *Wild* survey

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Whether you are bushwalking, canyoning, kayaking, skiing or rafting, you must be able to rely on having

Dry-bag territory? Body-bag territory! (Glen Scott doing it for Channel Seven's Wednesday evening programme, *Who Dares Wins*, Mera Creek Falls, New South Wales.) Peter Blakeman

This survey summarises the findings of the writer, who was selected for the task because of, among other things, his knowledge of the subject and his impartiality. The survey was checked and verified by David Clark and reviewed by at least three of *Wild*'s editorial staff. It is based on the items' availability and specifications at the time of this issue's production; however, ranges and specifications may have changed in the weeks since then.

Some aspects of this survey, such as the assessment of value and features—and especially the inclusion/exclusion of certain products—entail a degree of subjective judgment on the part of the author, the referee and *Wild*, space being a key consideration.

'Value' is based primarily upon price, relative to features and quality. A more expensive product may be better suited for some uses or be judged more highly by someone whose main concerns are features and quality.

An important criterion for inclusion in a *Wild* survey is 'wide availability'. To qualify, a product must usually be stocked by a number of specialist outdoors shops in the central business districts of major Australian capital- and other cities.

Despite these efforts to achieve accuracy, impartiality, comprehensiveness and usefulness, no survey is perfect. Apart from the obvious human elements that may affect assessment, the quality, materials and specifications of any product may vary markedly from batch to batch and even from sample to sample. It is ultimately the responsibility of readers to determine what is best for their particular circumstances and the use they have in mind for gear reviewed.



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dry gear at the end of the day. Dry bags can be used either on their own inside a boat or strapped into a raft, or inside a pack to keep essential items dry. If you only want to waterproof your belongings occasionally you could use two or three well-knotted garbage bags or heavy-duty plastic bags, one inside the other; this method is cheap, but such bags lack the tear resistance and long-term durability possessed by the materials used to construct dry bags.

Today we take high performance in materials and technical fabrics used in the construction of our outdoors equipment and clothing for granted. By and large the major manufacturers of dry bags make excellent products which perform superbly. Serious buyers only have to think about price and weight/durability trade-offs and, of course, what size and colour they want. The ratings in the table for quality of material give an indication of the weight relative to tear- and abrasion resistance when new (we have not been able to conduct extended dur-

ability tests!). There is no significant difference in performance between the major product lines in terms of waterproofness; the determining factors are likely to be how you pack, seal and treat the bag. Value for money is of course a very subjective judgment and depends entirely on your particular needs and application.

As an example of the effectiveness of materials and closures, I have regularly used an Ortlieb Aquazoom SLR pouch (not reviewed but uses the same materials and closure system as that manufacturer's dry bags) to protect my camera on kayaking trips. It is usually submerged in a couple of centimetres of sea water in the bilges of a sea kayak, or knocks about in the back of a river boat. (See Trix in *Wild* no 62.) My first aid kit has survived many

trips in a Cascade Seal Pak in similar conditions. Neither product has let in any water whatsoever.

Note, however, that at least one manufacturer includes a disclaimer with each of its products insisting that they

## points to watch

### Packing

Ensure that sharp or hard objects (such as stakes or pegs) are well padded and will not rub against the dry bag itself—if indeed you really need to keep them dry. It is better to keep only those things which really need to be kept dry in the dry bag!

Be particularly careful when tying the dry bags into canoes or rafts. Keep frequently needed items in small, handy bags; and things that you don't need until the end of the day, in larger bags.

### Sealing

Make sure that you seal the bag correctly—not all makes use the same method. Squeeze out as much air as possible before sealing. When choosing a bag with a fold/roll and buckle system, allow about 20 centimetres of the bag's length for at least three-four rolls to seal effectively.

### Storage

Although most modern materials are resistant to all sorts of degrading nasties, it is a good idea to ensure that the bags avoid contact with chemicals and are not over-exposed to UV light. Wash them with soapy water and store them dry. Vinyl bags can be given a light wipe with a vinyl preservative such as Armor All.

*should not be expected to be completely waterproof. Some paddlers have found that even the best dry bag may occasionally let in a little water, particularly if submerged for any length of time. The larger, rucksack-style bags will generally be more difficult to seal with complete reliability. It is crucial with such bags to ensure that as much air as possible has been squeezed out before closing the seal; even a relatively small bubble of air, when compressed by being loaded from above or suddenly dropped or thrown from a boat, may 'pop' the seal. No dry bag should be treated as though it were indestructible. Pack it carefully in your boat or rucksack, try to keep it from full or even partial submersion, and if you *really* want that camera or other item to stay dry, put it in a second plastic bag and stuff something 'non-critical' such as a towel between it and the seal.*

Both Cascade and Ortlieb ranges are similar using a variety of coated fabrics of different weights, and roll-and-seal closures with snap-lock buckles. Ortlieb closures are a little lighter and just as effective as Cascade closures; but for users unfamiliar with the correct way of sealing a dry bag, Cascade bags have foolproof instructions printed on the closure strips: this should reduce the incidence of human error!

## Wild Equipment Survey

### Dry bags

Approx. volume (litres)	Approx. dimensions (depth x diameter), centimetres	Weight, grams	Material	Quality of material	Waterproof	Value for money	Comments	Approx. price, \$
<b>Cascade Designs USA</b>								
Baja Bag	20	41 x 23	410	20 oz PVC-coated nylon	***	****	****	Other sizes (in litres) available: 5, 10, 30*, 35 long, 40*, 55*
See Bag	20	41 x 23	395	19 oz PVC-coated nylon	***	****	****	Other sizes (in litres) available: 5, 10, 30, 40
Kodiak Sac	25	69 x 20	225	200 denier Oxford nylon	***	****	****	Other sizes (in litres) available: 10, 15
Seal Pak	2	21 x 18	140	Urethane-coated nylon	***	****	****	Suited to wear on waist. Other size (in litres) available: B
Great Barrier Bag	20	65 x 23	255	430 denier Duralon	****	****	****	Other sizes (in litres) available: 15, 25 long, 30
Boundary Pack	115	25 x 37 x 51*	1530	20 oz PVC-coated nylon with 34 oz base	***	****	***	Removable, padded harness. Other sizes (in litres) available: 35*, 70*
Pro Pack	115	32 x 47 x 76*	2295	20 oz PVC-coated nylon with 34 oz base	***	****	**	Removable, padded harness/hip belt. Other size (in litres) available: 70*
<b>Ortlieb Germany</b>								
Dry Bag	22	75 x 22	240	PD 350 double PU-coated polyester	***	****	***	Other sizes (in litres) available: 13, 34, 59, 109
Dry Bag	22	75 x 22	140	PS 17 single PU-coated nylon	****	****	***	As above
Dry Bag	22	75 x 22	250	PS 34 single PU-coated nylon	****	****	***	As above
Clothes Bag	22	75 x 22	360	PS 490 single PU-coated polyester	***	****	***	As above. Repair kit available for RRP \$13
2D Sack	29	70 x 43	170	PS 17 single PU-coated nylon	****	****	****	Other sizes (in litres) available: 15, 39
Canoe Sack	130	112 x 48	1460	PS 620C single PU-coated Cordura	****	****	**	Includes padded harness
* poor    ** average    *** good    **** excellent    Cascade Designs All closures are Cascade Dry Seal fold-and-buckle system. All bags are radio-frequency (RF) welded. Dry-bag repair kit available at extra cost (RRP \$6.50). * breadth x width x depth ** heavy-duty bags    Ortlieb All closures are Ortlieb Roll 'n' Snap system. All seams are 3D high-frequency welded. PU polyurethane PVC polyvinyl chloride    The country listed after the manufacturer's name is the country in which the products are made								

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Ortlieb is so confident of the quality of the material and construction of its bags that each one has an individual serial number. It has used serial numbers to improve manufacturing processes and remedy the cause of defects.

Ortlieb seams have about half the overlap of Cascade seams and use a similar radio-frequency (RF) welding technique but for practical purposes this is not of great significance and seams on both makes are neat and compact. Neither manufacturer allows stitching to penetrate the fabric of its products: all attachments are sewn to vinyl patches and then welded on.

What is probably more important is choosing a bag of the right size to fit into your kayak or rucksack without having too much excess material. Some dry bags are constructed with reinforced seams (Ortlieb 2D Sacks and Cascade Kodiak Sacs) to be slightly oval when full rather than round so that they fit better into such long, narrow spaces as are found in the backs of kayaks.

New versions of the Cascade Kodiak Sacs have a cunning valve at the closed end which makes squeezing air out of the bag

easy: pack the bag, close the main seal, squish the air out, and do up the valve—a simple answer to what can be a frustrating problem for kayakers. (Remember, however, that every 'hole' in a dry bag's main material is another potential point of leakage, no matter how well the bag is sealed and designed.)

For pack-lining purposes, you should be able to use bags made from materials of lighter weight provided you don't allow stoves or tent-poles to rub against the bag from the inside. Choose more durable material if you need to strap your bags into a raft or canoe. It worth choosing lighter material if you have to carry everything: choose heavier material for group usage or extended trips. Lighter material is also more pliable and easier to pack into confined spaces such as a kayak. In general, the robustness of the materials listed in the table improves with the increase in either their designated weight (in the case of the Cascade products; for example, '20 oz' is more robust than '18 oz') or classification (in the case of Ortlieb products; for example, 'PS 490' is more robust than 'PS 34'—although not ten times as robust!). Each manufacturer makes various claims regarding the flexibility and durability of its fabrics, which you should evaluate yourself when selecting a bag.

In addition to those listed in the table, a number of other manufacturers produce 'waterproof' or water-resistant bags which outdoors enthusiasts may find suitable for some applications. In general, these do not have the same standard of materials, seams or seals as those surveyed here. In particular, these bags do not employ the high-tech RF welding system for producing leak-proof seams. Other products which fall into the general category of 'waterproof bags' and which are available at some outdoors shops and at many 'disposals' shops include pack covers, pack liners, waterproof panniers for bicycles and large, water resistant 'tote bags'. These products were not considered appropriate for inclusion in this survey, which is limited to specialist dry bags for uncompromising applications such as white-water kayaking or canyoning.

The table includes only a selection of the Ortlieb and Cascade ranges. These comprise a span from conventional dry bags and waterproof camera pouches to items such as the Boundary Pack (Cascade) or the Canoe Sack (Ortlieb), which are ultradurable, waterproof rucksacks with, in the case of the Cascade Pro Pack, detachable harness- and hip-belt systems.

Prices and specifications are those quoted by the manufacturers in September/October 1996. When considering the quoted volumes and dimensions, keep in mind that these can be measured in a number of

different ways (for example, sealed and rolled up or unsealed and open) and satisfy yourself that the product you buy is large (or small) enough for your intended purposes.

Guy Reeve

## RUCKSACKS

### ● Being green

Aiking adds the new *Walkabout travel pack*, and a few ingenious items, to its array of outdoors gear. Available in a 60 and 70 litre capacity (as well as a women's fit), the Walkabout is shaped like other travel packs in the Aiking range—with smooth and round cut features—but is smaller (by five litres) and has a more streamlined, contoured top. Aiking also introduces a new fabric, *Waterloc 77*, into its range of bushwalking packs. Waterloc 77 is a light-

You don't need any help with the brand! H2O Pac water-carrier, top, and Trash & Treasure rubbish bag, bottom, attached to a rucksack.



er weight canvas material based on a core of polyester wrapped in cotton. Arranged into a grid pattern, it makes a Ripstop-style fabric intended to combine strength with waterproofness.

Have you ever had your plastic bag loaded with food scraps and other rubbish, explode and dribble over other items in your rucksack? Aiking takes an environmental initiative with the *Trash & Treasure*, a portable system to carry garbage that features a large, separate compartment with a twin-zip opening. The *H2O Pac* is a slim, six litre *water-carrier* which can be worn like a day pack; otherwise it is attachable, like the *Trash & Treasure*, to all Aiking bushwalking and hybrid rucksacks. Available in most outdoors shops. RRP \$429, \$29 and \$35, respectively.

### ● Plug into this

In line with a number of ergonomic *day packs* emerging on the Australian rucksack market, Israeli manufacturer *Modan* presents the *Energy* day pack. Claimed to

## TRIX

### Naturally clean Water filtration, naturally, by David Gamble

Often when travelling I have had to contend with very cloudy water. A few years ago we were camped at Hattah Lakes—the water was very murky, and we were all looking forward to a cup of tea. Unfortunately, even after boiling it for a good long time, the water did not look much better. I then recalled an old bushies' trick that I had first heard many years ago. Picking up a piece of charcoal (about the size of a walnut), I tossed it into the billy. There was no immediate apparent reaction, but after a while the suspended clays in the water flocculated and settled out (with the charcoal), leaving the water crystal clear.

We subsequently tried the trick on water from the Murray, the Darling, the Cooper, and roadside puddles. It really works and is a lot cheaper—and simpler—than fancy filters. As an added bonus, boiling also gets rid of any nasty viruses, which are very hard to filter. The only things that this boil/charcoal method might miss are chemicals (such as pesticides and heavy metals). If in doubt about the quality of the water you have just stumbled across, the safest approach of all is to collect it from somewhere else, but if all that needs to be removed is a bit of mud, try this simple trick.

*Wild* welcomes readers' contributions to this section; payment is at our standard rate. Send them to the address at the end of this department.

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weigh one kilogram, the Energy is shaped like a raindrop—with a 30 litre capacity—and would best suit 'active' sports such as rogaining, where weight carried close to the body is critical. Available in some outdoors shops. RRP \$160.

touring—all these Fox River socks are made from soft merino wool with a touch of stretch nylon. Distributed by Ansco. RRP \$23–\$33.

### • Jean Jeanie...

Something a little different from a pair of traditional denim jeans, Cigana Sportswear presents its *Quick dry jeans*. With a 30 per cent polypropylene (Alpha Olefin) content mixed with denim—producing faster drying and being warmer—a pair of these may be well suited for travelling. Cigana claims that Quick-dry, equipped with five pockets, are also crease- and fade-resistant. Distributed by Cigana Sportswear, they retail for about \$100.

## TENTS

### • Design your own adventure

Melbourne-based company *Adventure Designs* presents a few goodies ready to be stuffed into the Christmas stockings.

Sleeping out under the stars must surely be one of the delights of bushwalking. However, when the creatures of the night begin to bite it's a different story—but the



free-standing *Mozzie Dome* may take the sting out. The *Mozzie Dome* (230 x 130 centimetres and weighing 1.5 kilograms) appears to be well designed, functional and lightweight. It sleeps two, and has a tightly woven mesh outer and a waterproofed floor—when light rain begins to fall, throw the optional *nylon fly* over the top. Great for ultra-light camping. RRP \$129 (with an additional \$38.50 for the *nylon fly*, which also includes a ridge pole).

In a similar vein, and literally cutting corners, the *Lightweight Mummy sleeping-mat* (183 x 51 x 2.5 centimetres, weight 890 grams) is a weight saver thanks to a tapered, 'mummy-shape' design. RRP \$128.

The *Humpback* dome-shaped tent (140 x 210 centimetres) offers four-season protection. At a claimed weight of 3.1 kilograms, the *Humpback* is supported by two cross-poles with the addition of a ridge 'strut' pole and also features taped fly seams and large, twin vestibules and doors. (When slumbering, be sure to whine in symphonic harmony with your offshore cousins of the deep.) RRP \$469. The new, contoured *AAG Gaiters* appear to offer a snug fit with a wide Velcro and draw-cord top closure. RRP \$30. Available in most outdoors shops.

Ouch! *Adventure Designs Mozzie Dome* tent including optional *nylon fly*.

## MISCELLANEOUS

### • If it's not on, it's not on

Overexposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays is increasingly—and literally—a burning issue with many Australians particularly with the onset of summer when more time is spent outdoors. Australian *Prins International* offers some respite from such damage. Likely to appeal to just about anyone who spends a lot of time outdoors, from bushwalkers to bird-watchers, the *Prins sun gloves*, UV protection *T-shirt*, *polo shirt*, cool *helmet cap*, and maximum-coverage *legionnaire's cap*—all with a 50+ sun-protection rating—are made of comfortable to wear, breathable and flexible polyamide. Don't sizzle this summer—cover up. Available from *Prins International*, Freecall 1800 685 656, the items sell for RRP \$12.95, \$22, \$35, \$13.50 and \$12.95, respectively.

### • As a bug in a rug

An inner sheet for your sleeping-bag not only keeps you warmer but also keeps your sleeping-bag cleaner. A simple but cleverly designed *sleeping-bag liner*—made by Australian *Snugs! Outdoors Industries*—appears to go one better on both counts. Shaped to fit the taper of your body—but not constricting—the *Snug!* sleeping-bag liner (87 x 205 centimetres), made of fast-drying, non-dyed 100 per cent silk, provides maximum warmth and minimum weight. The contoured and draw-cord hood helps to reduce the build-up

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## CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR

### • Feel foxy

A variety of plush walking socks is now available from US manufacturer *Fox River*. Reinforced in the heel, sole and toe for durability and fitted with elastic arch-support panels, the *Saragossa*, *Pyrenees*, *Bilbao* and *Gibraltar* models aim to offer superior comfort for both walking and skii-

Ibex



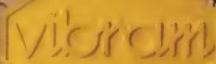
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of dirt and body oils around the sleeping bag's hood. All seams are double stitched and folded. Indeed, the sample we examined in the *Wild* office looked impressive. Made by and available by direct mail-order for \$46.95 from Snugs! Outdoor Industries, PO Box 201, Concord West, NSW 2138. Phone (02) 9743 2894.

in older cars, I would suggest that users of camping stoves check their stoves' fuel tank seals when refilling and carry and replace with new seals or O-rings when deterioration is visible. I've put the extra O-ring in my first aid kit; thanks for the advice, Andrea.

Geoff Wayatt

### It's in the bag

Thirsty? Israeli manufacturer Source, which is perhaps better known for its sturdy and attractive sport sandals, introduces a number of new and functional water-bags onto the market. Ranging from 1–5 litres in capacity, the Source *Pelican Bag in Bag* series of water-bags includes the *Pelican Packer*—more like a water pack than a water-bag. Flexible, insulated by polyurethane and encased in Cordura, it is shaped to fit your back like a small day pack and holds up to 2.5 litres of liquid. It also features an innovative, free-hand draw valve fixed on to the drinking tube: Source claims that the liquid flow is regulated by an action similar to that of sipping through a straw—no need to squeeze the tube, the valve opening or to bite in order to control the flow. This would make it ideal for many outdoors activities. Distributed by Nomad Travel Equipment. RRP \$29–\$99.

### Where there's smoke...

In addition to the assorted stoves available on the Australian market at present (see Equipment Survey, *Wild* no 58), the *Explorer*—multi-fuel and compact—joins the stable of Swedish-made *Optimus* stoves. Supported on three legs, the *Explorer* expedition stove (attached to a fuel line and a pressurised bottle when in use) features a sliding valve (enabling you to vary the mix of air-fuel and therefore obtain optimal heat) and a 'multikey' which is a stove-maintenance tool and flame-control device rolled into one. Claimed to weigh a total of 535 grams (including the multikey) the *Optimus Explorer* appears to be well made and stable. Distributed by Ansco. RRP \$299.

### Fuel bottle O-ring warning

I recently discovered severe *O-ring* deterioration on one of my cooking-stove fuel bottles. The thought of unnoticed leakage while cooking in a high, remote snow-cave prompted me to write to the manufacturers, *MSR* in Seattle, with my concerns about its *O-rings*' quality. 'Andrea' from *MSR* offered the following response: 'We tend to see such deterioration on *O-rings* used outside of the US. The cause seems to be higher alcohol content in fuels abroad, especially Germany! I suspect this may be the cause in your case! Any fuel other than pure, white gas will cause advanced deterioration of the *O-rings*.' As a result of the recent uncovering of exceptionally high levels of aromatics in NZ car fuel and fires



A touch of the sun? Prins International legionnaire's cap.

### Forest for the trees

Four new *log* journals from US *Wy'East Log Company*—the *Peak Log*, *Backpackers Log*, *Rockclimbers Log* and *Mountain Bike Log*—offer colourful alternatives to blank journals for those who enjoy recording their up-to-the-minute details and action while out there strutting their stuff. Claimed to be made of recycled materials, each log is tailored in design to suit its respective activity to some degree. Distributed by *Grant Minervini Agencies* and available in some outdoors shops. RRP \$35, except the *Backpackers Log*, which costs RRP \$26. 

# BOWYANGS

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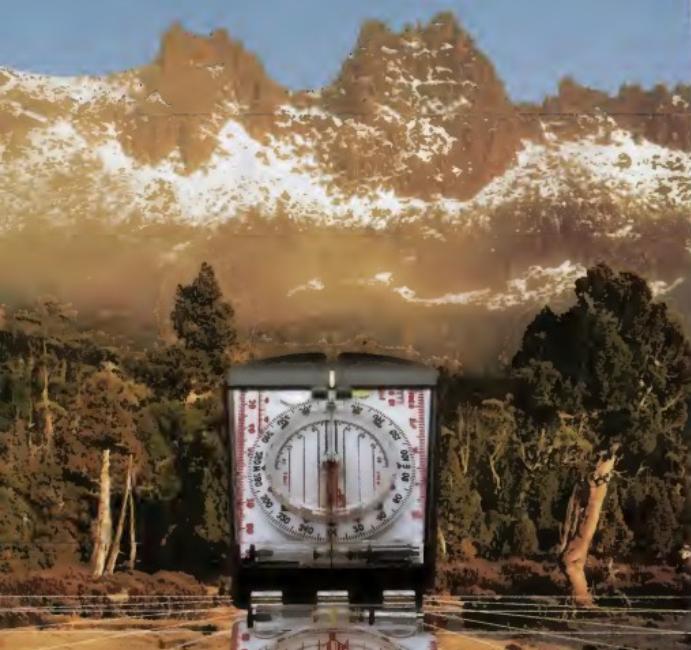
WILD

This department describes new products which the editorial staff consider will be of interest to readers. The tests they applied for inclusion are whether a product is *useful* for the rucksack sports, and whether it is fundamentally *new* (or newly available in Australia). The reports are based on information provided by the manufacturer/distributor. As is the case with all editorial text appearing in *Wild*, publication of material in this department is *in no way connected with advertising*. Submissions for possible publication are accepted from advertisers and from businesses not advertising in *Wild*, as well as from our readers. (See also the footnote at the end of this department.)

Products (on loan to *Wild*) and/or information about them, including colour slides, are welcome for possible review in this department. Written items should be typed, include recommended retail prices and preferably not exceed 200 words. Send them to the Editor, *Wild*, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181.

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14 JOURNAL

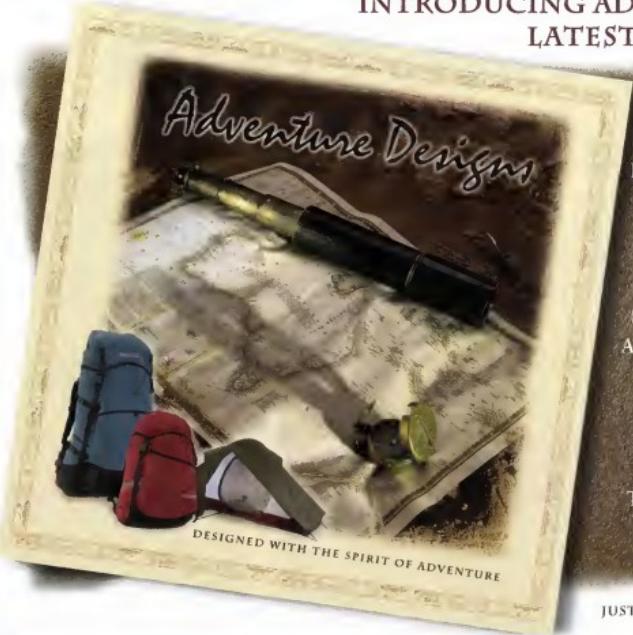
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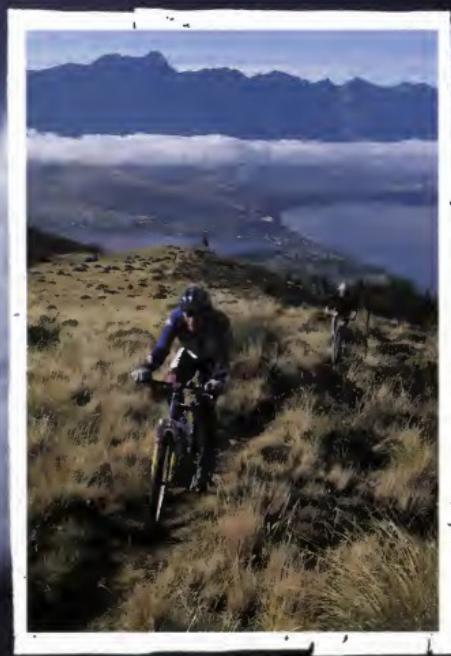


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# Bush creatures

A plethora of natural history titles

## BOOKS

● **Ancient Mountains & Desert Sands**  
by David Wagland (Yarran Publications, 1996, RRP \$29.95 soft cover, \$39.95 hard cover).

The Pilbara is in Australia's arid northwest, some 510 000 square kilometres of deserts, mountains, plains and river gorges. David Wagland takes his readers on what is at times an almost spiritual journey across one of our most remarkable, yet least known, outback frontiers. Wagland's knowledge of the region is immediately apparent, and his background as a geologist is a valuable asset in describing an area considered to be one of the oldest land-forms in the world. Wagland colourfully describes the original inhabitants, early European explorers, pioneers and miners in what can be a harsh and unforgiving region.

Although a glossy, coffee-table production, *Ancient Mountains & Desert Sands* is refreshingly down to earth. What Wagland's photographs sometimes lack in technical expertise is more than made up for by the honesty that his images impart. The layout of the book is appealing and together the words and photographs weave a fascinating tapestry. For those with an interest in the outback, its people, history and geography, or who have ever contemplated a visit to the Pilbara, *Ancient Mountains & Desert Sands* will stir the imagination. *Glen Tempst*

● **The Travellers' Guide to North Queensland: Cairns and Surrounds**  
by Paul Curtis (Envirobook, 1996, RRP \$14.95).

As the name suggests, this guide is intended for the casual bush explorer rather than the serious bushwalker. The purpose of the guide is to describe walks which can be done in a weekend or in three days using Cairns as a base. Countless short walks are described as well as some longer ones including Mt Bartle Frere, Cedar Bay, Walsh's Pyramid and the shorter coastal walks of Hinchinbrook Island. In general, the book is extremely useful as this area of

Australia is often overlooked by guidebook writers—especially by those prepared to give such detailed descriptions.

The track notes are very precise and extremely detailed, giving distances to fractions of a kilometre and average times to the nearest minute. Reading them gives you a certain confidence in the author—that

each would increase the value of the maps. A regional map showing the location of each walk would also assist.

In all, 52 walks are described. There are additional notes on safety, relevant contacts and equipment check-lists, and each walk is graded according to difficulty and given the more subjective assessment of 'value for effort'. The book is clearly a worthwhile addition to the guidebook genre and I shall certainly use it on my next trip to north Queensland.

*Robert Rankin*

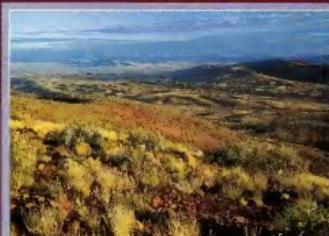
● **Rainforest and Ravished Snow**

by Alan Andrews (Tabletop Press, 1996, RRP \$34.95).

In his introduction to *Rainforest and Ravished Snow* Alan Andrews admits his own difficulty in defining what the book is about. Certainly it is easier to describe its contents than to discern a unifying theme. Its 12 chapters alternate between the Snowy Mountains and the mountainous hinterland of the mid north coast of New South Wales, as Andrews recounts vari-

## Ancient Mountains & Desert Sands

David Wagland

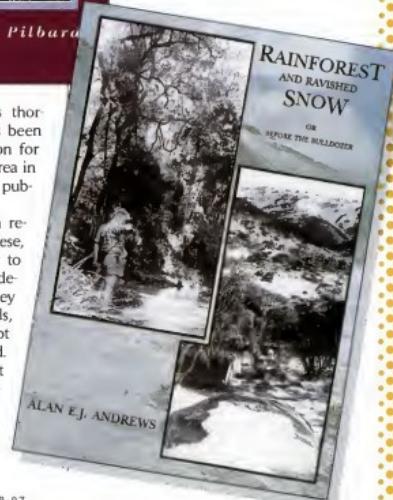


Impressions of the Inland Pilbara

he actually surveyed these areas thoroughly himself. In fact, Curtis has been collating information on the region for 20 years and has revisited every area in the 12 months leading up to publication.

As well as detailed notes, each region is accompanied by maps. These, too, are clearly laid out and easy to follow. They are probably best described as 'logical' maps in that they show the connections of roads, tracks, creeks and the like but not the correct scale or lie of the land. For this you will need the relevant topographic map which is indicated for that walk.

An arrow indicating the direction of north and a clearer explanation of the variable scale of



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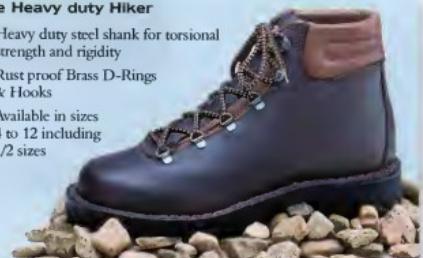
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ous journeys by ski and on foot, respectively, in these two widely separated regions. Interleaved with the text are poems, drawings, photos and nicely crafted sketch maps.

In the Snowy Mountains, Alan Andrews combined an interest in retracing the routes taken by early European explorers with a yen to ski-tour in areas seldom visited by skiers—even when this entailed venturing into indifferently snow-covered and marginally skiable terrain. The search for surviving stands of 'brush' or rainforest provided the impetus for his several long walks in the catchments of the Hastings, Manning and Hunter Rivers; in addition, he has family roots in that region and some of the narrative concerns itself with reminiscence and with investigation of the lives led by his forebears.

The book's subtitle—"Before the Bulldozer"—hints at the common ground shared by its disparate elements. All these journeys were undertaken at a time when roadless wilderness was much more abundant than it is today. His search for rainforest did not always yield success; much of the 'brush' had, even then, been logged or cleared for farming.

I felt that the book's twin themes—the quest for rainforest and for 'lonely snows'—did not cohere particularly well; but perhaps that doesn't matter too much. It's a discursive ramble of a book, unlikely to please all its readers all the time. It's safe to say, however, that its good parts make it a worthwhile and valuable window to the past. The whole production has a pleasantly homespun feel to it; what the text and illustrations lack in technical polish they make up for with a particular sort of personal charm. Both style and content exhibit a beguiling modesty—a refusal on the author's part to take himself or his adventures too seriously. In spite of its detours and discontinuities, to read *Rainforest and Ravished Snow* is a literary journey worth taking.

Trevor Lewis

#### Walking in Switzerland

by Clem Lindenmayer (Lonely Planet, 1996, RRP \$19.95).

At the outset I have to admit that I've done little walking in Switzerland. But after having travelled through that country using Lonely Planet's travel guide *Switzerland—a Travel Survival Kit* I'm sure that this guidebook will be an invaluable asset and reference for anyone preparing to 'go bush' in Switzerland.

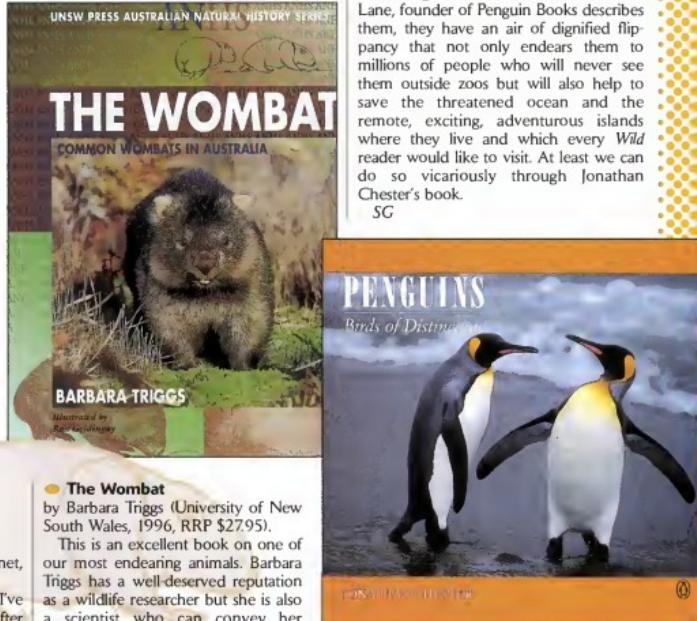
As in all Lonely Planet guides, there is a large introductory section (much of it gleaned from the other Switzerland guide mentioned above) giving basic facts that an overseas traveller might require. The book is then divided into eight walking areas. An entire chapter is devoted to each and there are numerous supporting maps that show the suggested walks (although these maps

are only intended as a guide and a traveller would have to purchase topographic maps when arriving in Switzerland).

The notes to the areas I've been to, around (Mt) Titlis (south of Lucerne) and the Jungfrau (Interlaken region), appear extremely accurate and informative and I expect that is also the case for the remaining areas described.

With such an array of spectacular mountain peaks in Switzerland, it may seem odd to a visitor from Australia or New Zealand that the 'wilderness experience' is difficult to find because of the number of cable-cars, mountain railways and grazing cows. But don't let that deter you; the charm of the small, quaint and rustic mountain villages, the sight and sound of a herd of cows and their bells, and the friendliness of the locals are things you'll appreciate as soon as you arrive. You may never return home!

Glenn van der Knijff



#### The Wombat

by Barbara Triggs (University of New South Wales, 1996, RRP \$27.95).

This is an excellent book on one of our most endearing animals. Barbara Triggs has a well-deserved reputation as a wildlife researcher but she is also a scientist who can convey her knowledge accurately and in a way that is easy and pleasurable to read. Wombats are evidently much more than the subject of her study; they are animals to which she is deeply attached. Her advice to people wishing to rear orphan wombats in the home is obviously based on personal experience—once young wombats have practised digging, carpet is never the same again!

This affection for the animals also comes through in the illustrations by Ross Goldingay, himself a notable wildlife biologist, and the book includes a fine collection of photographs of many aspects

of wombat behaviour, even one of a mother carrying a sizeable baby on its back through the snow.

Stephen Garnett

#### Penguins: Birds of Distinction

by Jonathan Chester (Penguin Books, 1996, RRP \$24.95).

It was inevitable that one day Penguin Books would publish a book on their eponymous birds, and Jonathan Chester has done them proud. It has been said that you have to be talented *not* to take good photographs in Antarctica but it is not the spectacular backdrop but the character of the birds that is reproduced on these pages.

And the book is more than photographs. Chester has read widely and the text, as well as being accurate and informative, is full of quotes from the many people who have been entertained by penguins in the past. Penguins might have been designed to star in cartoons. As Allen Lane, founder of Penguin Books describes them, they have an air of dignified flippancy that not only endears them to millions of people who will never see them outside zoos but will also help to save the threatened ocean and the remote, exciting, adventurous islands where they live and which every Wild reader would like to visit. At least we can do so vicariously through Jonathan Chester's book.

SG

#### The Way of the Birds

by Meme McDonald, illustrated by Shane Nagle (Allen & Unwin, 1996, RRP \$19.95).

This story is about a girl and a curlew. Through the dream of a young child the reader journeys across the world with a curlew and comes to understand the way of these marvellous, migratory wading birds. As they travel north each year to breed, their existence is threatened in many ways. In the densely populated regions of Asia they are hunted for food. The chain of wetlands on which they rely

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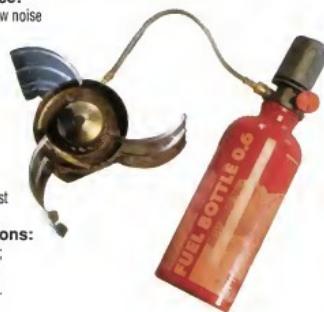
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for resting and feeding on their 10 000 kilometre journey is being destroyed by development. The message of this moving story is to preserve the habitat of the curlews so that they can continue to survive their annual pilgrimage. The young star of the story finds an innovative way to ensure that her curlew has a safe journey, and we must all learn from her example. Memé McDonald's imaginative writing is en-

### Wilderness of Queensland 1997

(Robert Rankin, RRP \$12.95).

### Wilderness Tasmania 1997

(Rob Blakers, RRP \$8.95).

### Wilderness of Victoria 1997

(Robert Rankin, RRP \$12.95).

### Natural Australia Desk Diary 1997

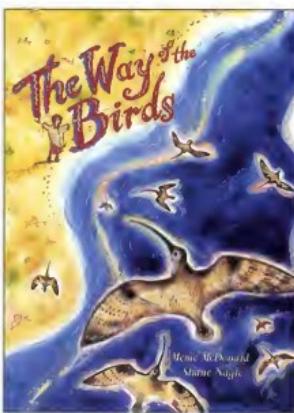
(Australian Conservation Foundation, RRP \$29.95).

### Wilderness of Australia Diary 1997

(Robert Rankin, RRP \$14.95).

### Wilderness Diary 1997

(Australian Conservation Foundation, RRP \$18.95).



hanced by Shane Nagle's surrealistic illustrations and although intended for older children, this is a book for child and adult alike.

Sue Baxter

## CALENDARS AND DIARIES

### Birds of Australia 1997

(The Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, RRP \$16.95).

A new bird each month! Beautifully photographed birds, complete with such vital statistics as where you will find them (along with distribution maps) and what their peculiar habits are make this calendar irresistible whether you are a bird fancier or not.

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SB

### The Australian Panorama 1997

(Robert Rankin, RRP \$12.95).

### Australian Panoramic Landscapes 1997

(Michael Ryan, RRP \$14.95).

### Australia's Rainforests 1997

(Robert Rankin, RRP \$12.95).

### Tasmanian Wilderness Calendar 1997

(Peter Dombrovskis, RRP \$17.95).

### Wilderness of Australia 1997

(Robert Rankin, RRP \$12.95).

### Wilderness of New South Wales 1997

(Robert Rankin, RRP \$12.95).

## MAPS

### Lamington National Park

(Hema, 1996, RRP \$6.00).

This new map of the rainforest-clad Lamington National Park in south-east Queensland is clear, concise and a pleasure to read. The main reasons for this are its good use of colour to distinguish roads, tracks, contours and creeks and its uncluttered layout.

This map provides enough information for someone armed with a walkers' guidebook clearly to understand the layout of the park and reach all the popular destinations without difficulty. The graded walking-track network in Lamington is more complex than that in any park I know in Australia and each circuit is colour-coded to make it easier to follow. As well as the graded tracks there are many rough bush tracks covering the more remote regions. These, too, are marked on this map and are accurate in most places. The minor inaccuracies are in fact mentioned on the map and thus shouldn't be a problem when out in the field.

Cliffs are drawn in three dimensional fashion, which helps to give the terrain some relief but better use could have been made of the overall green colour. Although Lamington is predominantly rainforest there are significant areas of open eucalypt and this could have been easily incorporated by varying the shading. The map also includes brief essays on bush-walking and camping, geology, natural history—and on what you will see along the way.

RR

## POSTERS AND CARDS

### Australian Panoramas Christmas Cards

(Robert Rankin, 1997, RRP \$9.95 for box of 12).

### Australian Wildflowers Christmas Cards

(Estella Rankin, 1997, RRP \$9.95 for box of 12).

### Wilderness of Australia Christmas Cards

(Robert Rankin, 1997, RRP \$9.95 for box of 12). ☀

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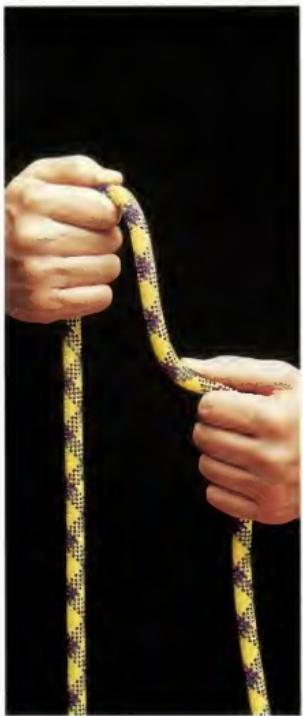
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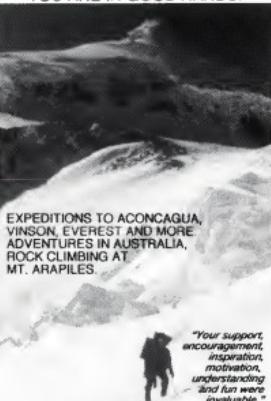
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'I split the billy.'  
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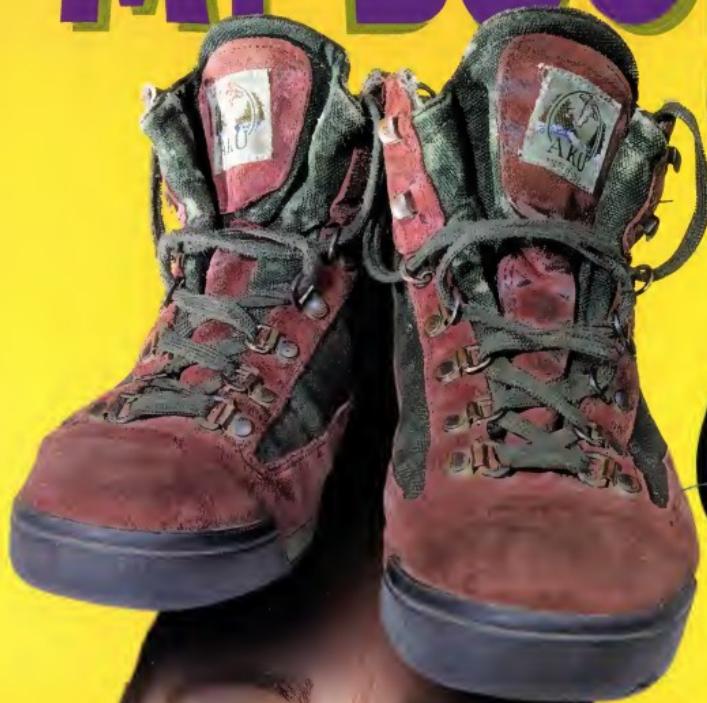


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